

Call for Proposals

ETH4D Humanitarian Action Challenges

1. Background

Humanitarian organisations in general and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in particular are facing immense challenges in the 21st century. In 2019, 216 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 69 countries. Extreme climate events, such as floods, storms and droughts, are on the rise, thereby increasing the vulnerability of people already suffering from conflict¹. Therefore, ETH Zurich and EPFL are joining forces with the ICRC to explore innovative solutions to such crises.

The goal of the [ETH4D Humanitarian Action Challenges](#) is to support project-based research between ETH Zurich researchers, EPFL researchers, the ICRC and other humanitarian organisations to develop effective solutions for a greater impact of humanitarian action.

ETH for Development (ETH4D) is the managing office of this call at ETH Zurich. The aim of ETH4D is to develop innovative solutions that effectively address the challenges of the global population and to educate future change makers, who will work towards decreasing global poverty and inequality, as well as protecting our planet.

2. Definition of ETH4D Humanitarian Action Challenges

An ETH4D Humanitarian Action Challenge must be a clearly defined research question designed to increase the impact of humanitarian action or to enable humanitarian actors to address new and emerging challenges. This question must be related to (i) the research interests of an ETH research group and (ii) the current or future work of the humanitarian partner.

The objective of ETH4D Humanitarian Action Challenges must be the development, testing, evaluation or implementation of an innovative product, policy or service – involving a technology (as part of the solution or as part of the research) that responds to a specific humanitarian challenge.

Examples include:

- Drones, infrared cameras and AI to detect landmines
- Privacy-enhancing facial recognition techniques for beneficiary recognition
- Cyber-security of humanitarian data flows

¹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, UN-OCHA, 2020

- Appropriate and low-cost protective equipment for health care workers
- Thermostable rotavirus vaccine
- High-performance prosthetic foot at a low price points

3. Eligibility

The team must consist of at least one main applicant from ETH who holds a PhD (or who is a professor with or without a PhD), and at least one partner from an eligible humanitarian organization. In addition, it is encouraged (but not mandatory) to have one partner from a low- or lower-middle-income country, a partner from EPFL (which allows for a parallel submission at EPFL) or a partner from another humanitarian organisation. Partners from the rest of the ETH Domain (PSI, WSL, Empa, and Eawag) are welcome to join as co-applicants.

Applying humanitarian organisations must:

- be [principled humanitarian organizations](#)
- have a humanitarian purpose and track record
- be registered as non-profit organizations

The EHA Steering Committee has approved a [list of eligible humanitarian organizations](#). If your potential partner organization is not included on this list, a mandatory pre-qualification by the EHA Steering Committee must be completed before you can submit your application. Please contact the EHA coordination team via salome.raeuschel@nadel.ethz.ch. The Steering Committee retains the right to determine the eligibility of the potential partner organization.

If the main applicant is not an ETH professor, a letter of commitment by the ETH host professor or head of the unit, indicating their financial contribution to the project (25% matching funds), must accompany the proposal. ETH Zurich research groups which are not yet a member of ETH4D can also apply and will become a member if they are awarded a grant.²

Please note that a principal investigator (PI) can apply for a renewal of a concluded HAC project, in which case the PI needs to clearly state in the proposal that it is a prolongation of a concluded previous HAC project and justify in the proposal why additional research is needed. Furthermore, PIs that have an ongoing HAC project are also welcome to submit a new project proposal at the condition that the submitted project is unrelated to the ongoing HAC project. This should also be clearly stated in the proposal.

² ETH4D membership is open to all professors at ETH. The membership fee for the period 2019-2024 is 6kCHF for ETH professors and 3kCHF for SNSF professors.

4. Funding

Project duration is between 6-24 months.

Humanitarian Challenge Grants are between CHF 50'000 and CHF 300'000.

Funding **can cover** the following:

- The salaries of doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, scientific assistants I/II, senior scientists and interns at ETHZ - up to a total amount of CHF 120'000 per year (percentage of occupation can be adapted to meet this threshold)
- The salaries of doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, scientific assistants I/II, senior scientists and interns at all other institutions from the ETH Domain except for EPFL (funding for EPFL must be requested separately) - up to a total amount of CHF 120'000 per year (percentage of occupation can be adapted to meet this threshold)
- Salaries and project costs of partners (from humanitarian organisations or partners from low-/middle-income countries), which is limited to CHF 30'000
- Subcontracting by the PI (e.g. for application development or web interface development) is limited to CHF 30'000
- Materials
- Project-related equipment costs
- Field expenses
- Workshops and conferences
- Travel
- Research dissemination (including video deliverable)

The main applicant and potential co-applicants from the ETH domain (excluding EPFL) must provide matching funds corresponding to at least 25% of the requested grant. Matching funds can come from third-parties³ or professorship reserves. Staff costs of doctoral students, post-docs, research assistants and interns in Switzerland that are not funded by the grant count as matching funds. Any other salaries **cannot** count as matching funds. Matching funds by project partners have to be transferred to the ETH project account(s). ETH4D will coordinate the financial management with the Principal Investigator (PI) who submitted the proposal only.

³ It is the responsibility of the applicants to ensure that the proposed matching funds can indeed be used as matching funds.

5. Timeline

Call opening	14 October 2024
Call deadline	27 February 2025 (17:00 CEST)
Eligibility check	March 2025
Evaluation of proposals	April 2025
Final funding decision	June/July 2025
Notification to applicants	July 2025
Start of the projects	3-6 months post notification

6. Submission Procedure and Deadlines

Finding a humanitarian partner (matchmaking)

If you are an ETH researcher and have a research idea in mind, we can help you identify suitable partners at the ICRC or at another humanitarian organization for a HAC project. For more information please reach out to salome.raeuschel@nadel.ethz.ch as soon as possible. The deadline for such matchmaking requests is on **31 January 2025**.

Proposal submission

Proposal submissions are possible once per year. The application deadline for this fourth call is on **27th of February 2025** (17:00 CEST). All application documents must be written in English and submitted electronically (**in one single PDF file**) in the [online application form](#). They must include the following elements, in the following order:

- ☐ Application form (using [this template](#)), containing:
 - Cover sheet
 - Abstract
 - 3-4 pages research narrative, including background and motivation, the research plan, implementation strategy and expected results.
- ☐ Bibliography
- ☐ Work packages and Milestones shown in a Gantt-Chart.
- ☐ Budget, which must include matching funds (using [this template](#)).
- ☐ If the main applicant is not an ETH professor, a letter of commitment by the ETH host professor or head of the unit, indicating their financial contribution to the project, must accompany the proposal.

- ② Letter(s) of support from the humanitarian organization, and all other partners who will receive funding, showcasing long-term commitment to the project, signed by the humanitarian team member (focal point) and the project sponsor (typically head of unit). The letter(s) should clearly articulate the question to be addressed in the project, its relevance to the organization, and the contributions (staff time and/or financial, if applicable) the partner is willing to make to the project.
- ② CVs of all involved partners, including a list of major achievements. Please use the [SNSF CV format](#) for generating your CV.

If a proposal is developed jointly with an EPFL research group, the same proposal must be submitted twice: to ETH and to EPFL. Only the budget details will differ. For the ETHZ grant submission, the budget must detail the grant asked by the ETHZ main applicant as well as the matching funds. For the EPFL grant submission, the budget must show the grant asked by the EPFL main applicant as well as the matching funds.

Please note that ETH Zurich strives to promote gender equality in scientific research. Gender must be consistently taken into account from the proposal development to the research and dissemination phase.

- ② Study teams should make an effort to be gender balanced.
- ② Applicants who plan to involve humans as research subjects (e.g., end-users, patients, or survey respondents) must consider gender roles in experimental design, data collection and analysis, and outcome interpretation. If they do not consider the gender dimension, they must briefly explain why.

If applicable, relevant ethical, legal and social considerations must be included in the proposal. The proposed research must adhere to the principles of research integrity valid at ETH Zurich.

Recipients of a grant whose research includes human subjects have to receive approval from the ETH Ethics Commission and submit the approval documents to ETH4D as soon as they receive approval and before starting field work (note: this only applies once projects have been selected for funding by ETH4D).

7. Evaluation and Selection

All proposals will first be evaluated by a **selection committee** consisting of three academic members of ETH4D, an academic representative from EPFL, the Executive Director of ETH4D and a representative from the ICRC and a representative from the humanitarian sector. The chair of the Scientific Committee will ensure conflicts of interest are properly managed. The final decision of proposals to be funded will be made by the **steering committee** of the ETHZ-EPFL-ICRC partnership, which comprises two members of each organisation.

The evaluation criteria will be the following:

- **Quality and Innovation:** the project implies uniqueness and innovation and is embedded in a broader perspective. Results of the research have the potential to challenge the status quo and to be published in high-level international peer-reviewed journals.

- **Feasibility:** it is realistic to carry out the study and to deliver it in the given timeframe and with the requested resources. Work package and milestones are well defined and realistic.
- **Relevance:** the project has the potential to address a pressing problem or challenge faced by people in humanitarian crisis. Projects should provide clear arguments for why the research project differs from and/or improves upon existing or similar efforts.
- **Applicability:** the results will be used by the partnering humanitarian actor. The project has a realistic long-term implementation plan and measurable goals. The applicants are explicit about how the humanitarian partner (and, potentially, other humanitarian organisations) will use the results of their research.
- **Team qualifications and diversity:** the team members have relevant qualifications and experiences and the team has female representation as well as members from other groups that are typically underrepresented in science.
- **Financial contribution:** contributions of the main applicant and their potential co-applicants above the 25% threshold is positively evaluated; their partners provision of an adequate and realistic contribution (in terms of staff time and, if applicable, cash) as well.

Applicants will be notified of the funding decision by summer 2025. Projects must start on the first day of a month and **at the latest within four months of the notification of the decision.**

8. Deliverables

- Grantees are required to present their progress and discuss their open questions at a joint ETH4D-EssentialTech Centre HAC Grantees Workshop, which will take place once a year. During the workshop, they will also support other grantees' work in peer-to-peer learning sessions.
- Grantees must submit a 2-3 page scientific report by **15 September** each year (reporting period: 1st September or when the project starts - 31 August) as well as a final scientific report no later than three months after the completion of the project. The report must outline the research and other activities conducted with the grant money, the research results, and the planned next steps. A report template will be provided by ETH4D.
- Grantees must also submit a final financial report no later than three months after completing the project. This report must include all relevant excerpts from *refine*.
- Finally, grantees must submit a short video explaining the project to a non-scientific audience and at least one of the following deliverables, which has to be submitted/presented to the ETH4D Executive Office no later than three months after the grant period has ended:
 - A prototype of a new product or service
 - An article in the ETH Zukunftsblog (or other ETH outlet)
 - A policy brief that presents the findings to a non-scientific audience

An important aspect of ETH4D is to build bridges between science and society. The materials submitted will be made public on the ETH4D and EHA website and may be used for reporting and other outreach activities.

9. Terms of collaboration between partners of granted projects

Data exchanged within ETH4D programmes is generally not considered confidential information. A non-disclosure agreement should be signed before exchanging confidential data. An agreement between the ETHZ grantee and the project partner(s) must be signed within three months of the start of the project. Such an agreement will define the rights and obligations of the partners. It may allow the partners to use the results of the project for commercial and non-commercial purposes and will specify the relevant conditions. As an important note: ETHZ, EPFL and the ICRC have signed a framework contract, which defines the general principles of this collaboration.

If personally identifying information is used, exchanged, or collected in the framework of the research, the involved partners shall comply with applicable data protection laws and regulations, and shall establish a data management plan, including a data protection concept and appropriate data protection agreements in writing.

The projects must comply with the [KFPE principles](#)⁴.

All collaborations must follow [the Code of conduct for scientific cooperation of ETH Zurich \(RSETHZ 416\)](#) and the Guidelines concerning [Contracts in the Field of Research at ETH Zurich \(RSETHZ 440.31\)](#).

10. Financial Administration

Due to financial and controlling procedures, the ETH Finance Desk will open two separate PSP elements, one with the funding from ETH4D and one with the matching funds from the professorships' research reserves (Forschungsreserven). In case there is third party funding as part of the matching fund, the professorship will be asked to open a third PSP element.

On all PSP-Elements related to this project, only expenses for this project should be booked according to the budget provided. Furthermore, grant funds cannot be used to cover retrospective expenses.

In the unexpected case, the professorship does not submit the deliverables (see point 7 above) in time, ETH Controlling will automatically retrieve 20% of the provided ETH4D grant from the professors' research reserves (Forschungsreserven) and transfer it back to ETH4D (Budgetverschiebung) when closing the PSP-elements. It is forbidden to close the PSP elements before receiving the official closing letter by the EHA programme manager (Salome Räuschel) or the ETH4D executive director (Dr. Adina Rom).

⁴ https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe/11_principles_7_questions
https://naturalsciences.ch/oraganisations/kfpe/11_principles_7_questions