

# **Life-changing scholarships**

## **Online survey by FCS**

### **Swiss government scholarships 1996–2015**

#### **Summary: Results of the 2016 survey for the Federal Commission for Scholarships for Foreign Students (FCS)**

In this study, former FCS Swiss government scholarship holders from the years 1996–2015 were surveyed. This is the first survey since the introduction of the policy change in 2013; Swiss government scholarships are now awarded exclusively to PhD and postdoctoral researchers rather than those studying for a master's degree, as was the case up to 2012. The government scholarship programme has also been extended to all countries with which Switzerland maintains diplomatic relations. The only exceptions are a few industrialised countries with which there is no reciprocal scholarship agreement. Other instruments allowing academic exchanges are in place with these countries. The survey results allow conclusions to be drawn about the medium-term impact of the scholarship programme. The survey covered in particular (1) professional biography, (2) geographic mobility, (3) relationship to Switzerland and (4) the reasons for accepting an FCS scholarship and general experience with FCS. This information provides an up-to-date overview of FCS scholarship holders' careers after the end of the scholarship period.

It was possible to survey 1,194 former scholarship holders, equivalent to a response rate of more than 60%. The results show that former beneficiaries view the FCS scholarship as very positive and important for their career. Although not asked about their level of appreciation, many former scholarship holders expressed their gratitude for the opportunity offered to them by the FCS scholarship. This was certainly one of the reasons for the high response rate.

The information provided by the respondents about their professional career shows that the majority of former FCS beneficiaries (around 52%) of master's scholarships completed their master's degree at a Swiss university. Furthermore, the findings show that the majority of FCS beneficiaries (approximately 60% up to 2012, around 80% from 2013 onwards) either intend to pursue an academic path or were already working in academia at the time of the survey. The Human Development Index (HDI) rank of the country of origin has no influence on the current employment position of the scholarship holders. As expected, however, the more time that has elapsed since the scholarship was awarded, the higher the position held by the former scholarship holder.

The results on geographical mobility show that most of the respondents – just under three fifths – are no longer in Switzerland, but have returned to their country of origin. Most of

those (about 60%) who were in their country of origin at the time of the survey returned directly after their stay in Switzerland. In general, the mobile scholarship holders, i.e. those who were not working in their country of origin at the time of the survey – come from countries with a medium or low HDI. As suspected, a large number of scholarship holders migrate to countries with a very high HDI.

Around two thirds of all respondents stated that they maintain professional contacts with Switzerland. The proportion of respondents who are still in contact with Switzerland is of course higher among those scholarship holders who held a scholarship most recently. Former FCS scholarship holders also state that the reasons for applying for an FCS scholarship are primarily academic in nature: the scholarship is seen in particular as an opportunity to work in their own research field. The respondents state that their supervising universities, or more specifically the professors responsible for the academic supervision of the FCS scholarship holders, have helped them improve their methodological skills and to establish national and international contacts. The vast majority (89%) stated that the FCS scholarship has benefited their personal career development.