

Inspireurope
Recommendations:
**Expanding
opportunities
in Europe for
researchers at risk**

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Expanding opportunities in Europe for researchers at risk

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Contents

Introduction	6
Inspireurope Recommendations	8
1. Acknowledge and support researchers at risk in higher education and research, including as a matter of defending academic freedom, and as a contribution to diversity, equity, and inclusion	9
2. Establish a dedicated European fellowship scheme	11
3. Create national support programmes for researchers at risk	13
4. Facilitate access of researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes	14
5. Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk	15
6. Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk	16
7. Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk	18
8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk	19
Annex: Further information and resources	21

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Introduction

Around the world today, scholars are experiencing threats to their lives, liberty, and research careers, particularly in countries where legal frameworks and protections for human rights and democracy are weak. Many of these at-risk researchers have to leave their countries in order to find safety, refuge, support, and the intellectual space to continue their work. When researchers are at risk, not only are individual lives and careers in jeopardy, but the quality and very future of research is also at stake.

The Initiative to Support, Promote and Integrate Researchers at Risk in Europe (Inspireurope) has documented that there is already excellent work underway in Europe in support of researchers at risk. However, there are also serious shortfalls in several areas, and there is space to expand programmes and processes at both European and national levels. Systemic and concerted improvements across Europe would support international talent, advance shared knowledge, encourage diversity of thought, and drive innovation, which are cornerstones for academic freedom and university autonomy. Expanded programmatic opportunities for at-risk researchers would also hold tangible benefits for host universities, increasing their capacity to lead on various forms of social, political, cultural, and economic development. Support for researchers at risk is also a very concrete way for European countries to demonstrate their commitment to academic freedom, diversity, democracy, human rights, and inclusion.

The protection of the lives and careers of researchers at risk is essential work. Protection programmes address multiple aspects of discrimination, suppression, persecution, expulsion, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, and torture, alongside their effects on physical and mental health. The number of universities around the world has increased over the past decades; at the same time 70% of the world population now live under authoritarian rule of some form. Many higher education institutions therefore are situated in countries with weak democratic safeguards and cultures of academic freedom that face regular and significant challenges. As a result, the risks faced around the world by higher education communities remain significant.

The most recent data from the global Academic Freedom Index (AFI) reveals that almost two in five people worldwide live in countries where academic freedom has suffered a 'significant decline' during the past ten years. In its 2021 **Free to Think** report, the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network documented 332 attacks on higher education communities in 65 countries and territories over the past year alone. Against the backdrop of violent attacks, wrongful prosecutions, legislative and administrative actions restricting academic freedom, and other severe pressures, more researchers than ever are seeking pathways to safety.

The need for policies and actions to defend academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and more generally higher education and democratic values, has received growing attention by European policy makers and the higher education community in Europe. Increasingly, this attention has also included affirmation of the importance of acting in solidarity with researchers at risk, and acknowledgement of the interdependence between human rights and the advancement of academic freedom.

The Inspireurope project works to improve support in Europe for researchers at risk. The project results draw from the longstanding experience of project partners, and extensive consultation with researchers at risk, host institutions and other stakeholders. With the aim to enhance cooperation, build capacity, and further expand opportunities in Europe for researchers at risk, and in order to address present shortfalls in institutional and policy support, Inspireurope makes the following recommendations.

For each of the recommendations, the **annex** provides a compendium of resources, further details, examples of practice and links to relevant policy documents.

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8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk

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Inspireurope Recommendations

1. Acknowledge and support researchers at risk in higher education and research, including as a matter of defending academic freedom, and as a contribution to diversity, equity, and inclusion

In line with their commitment to European and international statements and agendas, the European Commission and the Member States are invited to develop systematic and well-coordinated approaches to support researchers at risk, in synergy with existing policies and actions in various areas, from education to foreign policy.

This would demonstrate a European commitment to academic freedom, and related values, such as diversity, equity and inclusion. It would also acknowledge and strengthen the efforts made by higher education institutions, in line with the Magna Charta Universitatum, to cherish and defend university values, to host and support researchers at risk, and to engage in academic solidarity.

Key policy documents of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Education Area (EEA) and Research (ERA) Areas have consistently, and with growing emphasis, pointed to the importance of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and diversity and inclusion as core values of higher education and research, and of democratic society at large. They have emphasised the need to cherish, protect, and defend these rights and values in Europe, and also in international exchange and cooperation, and have included solidarity with and support for researchers at risk as a cornerstone of this agenda. This has been declared in a number of policy documents, such as:

- the European Union's **Global Approach to Research and Innovation**, its 2022 Communication on a **European Strategy for Universities**, and **Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation**,
 - the 2021 **Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research**;
 - the 2020 **ERA for Research and Innovation Communication**, and the 2020 **Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**;
 - the 1988 **Magna Charta Universitatum**, and its **renewed 2020 version**, which are signed and cherished by universities, but also acknowledged and frequently referenced by governments in European level policy documents and in the development of national higher education frameworks.
- the **Rome 2020 Communiqué** of the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area;

Inspireurope welcomes the recent policy attention to academic freedom-related matters. At the same time, policy-level statements need to be operationalised and implemented through practical measures of support for researchers at risk.

European and national policy levels

Support for researchers at risk has to be included in European and national level policies, leading to strategic actions proactively protecting and promoting academic freedom and university autonomy at national levels as well as in international exchange and cooperation. It must be embedded within the wider context of policies and actions on democracy, human and civil rights, in order to raise broad awareness, build synergies, and develop advocacy links across a wider range of actors.

Beyond their moral duty to support researchers at risk, and the concern about values and rights, European governments should acknowledge the valuable contributions that researchers at risk bring to the European and national talent pools, to academic and research communities, labour markets and societies.

As part of the Team Europe approach, the EU and its member states should further engage in coordination and cooperation with international partners to promote and support academic freedom, in different national contexts. This would mobilise greater concern for academic freedom globally and enable and strengthen focused transnational responses to attacks on higher education communities.

The envisaged framework for monitoring higher education values in the EHEA is welcome. It should build on existing efforts, such as the Academic Freedom Index, which provides an evidence-based approach to help guide the work of European policy makers.

Within the European Commission, the establishment of a contact point for issues concerning academic freedom and researchers at risk could help to advance collaboration and synergies between thus far separate initiatives and funds of different Directorates General (Research and Innovation; Education, Culture and Youth; Migration and Home Affairs; Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations;

International Partnerships) and their respective agencies. Furthermore, a European expert group on both students and researchers at risk could be set up to facilitate the policy dialogue between EU institutions, member states and stakeholder organisations and to coordinate the design and implementation of possible European funding and support instruments.

All these efforts will lead to more efficient schemes to support researchers at risk, and better protection of university values and human rights, strengthen Europe's higher education and research sectors and the quality of their international cooperation and generally, contribute to Europe's social resilience.

Higher education institutions

Academic freedom and solidarity amongst academics are uncontested values of the higher education community. They are stated in the Magna Charta Universitatum and are frequently referenced by universities, university associations and networks. Even as they are perceived as central elements of the university, they must not be taken for granted.

Protection of academic freedom and solidarity with fellow academics should be clearly referenced in universities' mission and value statements and in their strategies and actions, including those for internationalisation and equity, inclusion and diversity, which many European higher education institutions already have in place. This should also recognise the contribution that researchers at risk bring to the institution and its research, education, and third missions, as international scholars.

Universities should ensure that academic freedom and solidarity with fellow academics are understood and promoted by all members of the institution, and clearly articulated by university stakeholders in their external cooperation with national and international partners across academia, society and industry.

The means and capacities of universities to act upon such values should be further developed and enhanced, with their support for researchers at risk as one of the measures. Furthermore, universities should share their experience in this regard through peer learning and training activities as well as public outreach.

2. Establish a dedicated European fellowship scheme

The European Union should develop a European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk, based on established good practices of existing national and international programmes. This would also inform and encourage the development of similar initiatives at EU member state level and inspire and coordinate exchange and collaboration.

Such an instrument is needed on a permanent basis and could be enhanced in times of crisis. Universities should showcase their support for researchers at risk by advocating the establishment of a European initiative.

The Inspireurope project has shown the urgent need for dedicated and sufficiently flexible funding instruments for researchers at risk, as well as for the institutions and organisations that support them.

Requests for assistance from at-risk researchers far exceed available funding for placements and positions through existing organisations and initiatives in Europe. There is no dedicated European funding scheme, and there are few national-level funding schemes for researchers at risk.

European and national policy level

The establishment of a dedicated European fellowship scheme would demonstrate the European commitment to academic freedom and invite knock-on effects at the level of member states and international partner countries.

A European fellowship scheme should comprise three distinct tracks:

- A first track should offer placements for researchers at risk, who are outside the refugee process, still in their home country, and facing an emergency situation.
- A second track should address researchers at risk who have already moved outside of their home country, and also include initial placements for refugee researchers, as well as follow-up funding for at-risk researchers who are outside the refugee process in order to extend their initial placement period.

Both fellowship tracks should include direct support for researchers at risk, as well as funding for measures for their inclusion within the host institution and host country. Placements should be provided for up to two years, with a possible extension for an additional year.

- A third track should provide seed funding for the creation of long-term support infrastructures for researchers at risk at national levels.

Funding for a European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk should make use of synergies between different European programmes and instruments, including Horizon Europe, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and the European Social Fund.

A European fellowship programme would provide a means to enable exchange and collaboration between national and international support programmes for researchers at risk, which would have a major impact on quality, efficiency and visibility. This would also help to ensure fast and concerted action in times of emergencies.

Higher education institutions

European universities, individually and collectively through university associations and networks, can play an important role in raising awareness for academic freedom. Universities can engage in advocacy towards national authorities and lend their voice in support for the establishment of a European fellowship scheme.

3. Create national support programmes for researchers at risk

National level programmes could be set up in addition to a European scheme. Lessons should be drawn from the few existing national initiatives. Higher education institutions can play a crucial role in establishing national level support for researchers at risk.

The creation of national level programmes for researchers at risk provides an opportunity for a tangible and powerful demonstration of public authorities' commitment to and support for academic freedom, democracy and civil values, and generally to diversity and inclusion in research and higher education. Highly visible programmes are likely to inspire other initiatives—nationally, across Europe and globally.

National policy levels

Existing national support programmes in Europe for researchers at risk are providing life-saving support to many scholars. These schemes provide excellent models and should be replicated across the EHEA. Drawing on the experience of established national fellowship programmes for researchers at risk, these schemes can be established in different formats:

- government-backed support programmes that provide dedicated fellowships and other direct support for researchers at risk;
- partnerships between national education or development agencies and organisations dedicated to supporting researchers at risk;
- partnerships with NGOs and international networks.

Inspireurope is ready to advise and assist ministries, national agencies and higher education institutions and other stakeholders interested in establishing national support schemes.

More generally, national authorities should ensure that universities are able to host, support and hire researchers at risk from third countries, by providing appropriate framework conditions, including elimination of legal and regulatory obstacles, budgetary flexibility, and harmonisation of human resources forms and processes to include at-risk researchers.

Higher education institutions

Universities can be an integral part in the setup and development of national support programmes by showcasing their commitment to supporting researchers at risk, and informing policy makers about opportunities and benefits resulting from welcoming international talent. In collaboration with other institutions and NGOs, HEIs may also establish national networks and structures.

Universities should furthermore alert national authorities to shortcomings in framework conditions and legislation that may hinder the hosting of researchers at risk and propose ways to overcome them.



4. Facilitate access of researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes

Rules and conditions for existing EU funding programmes for research and education should be adjusted to accommodate the specific situation of researchers at risk. Both national agencies and universities should contribute to informing researchers at risk about these opportunities.

European programmes such as MSCA and European Research Council (ERC) fellowship programmes are not well known amongst researchers at risk. More importantly, they are difficult to access, due to eligibility criteria, application procedures, and evaluation criteria. Some adjustment to existing schemes could increase participation by researchers at risk. While these programmes in their existing formats do not lend themselves to the emergency support that many researchers at risk require, they may provide researchers who are no longer at immediate risk an important opportunity to develop their careers.

European policy level

Access by researchers at risk to existing fellowship programmes, particularly the MSCA, should be widened, through the following lines of action:

- Communication about European and national programmes and their opportunities for researchers at risk should be enhanced: researchers at risk should be explicitly mentioned and encouraged to apply in calls for applications. European programmes should make use of national and international initiatives and networks supporting researchers at risk, including

Inspireurope, to ensure wide dissemination of their calls.

- Eligibility criteria should be adjusted; for example, the more flexible mobility rule that MSCA currently applies to applicants in the refugee process should be extended to those in an at-risk situation.
- Application procedures should be made more flexible: a second annual intake of applications would reduce waiting periods of researchers at risk. The joint nature of applications should be waived so that researchers could apply as individuals first, and approach potential host institutions once their MSCA application has been successful, pending an offer from a host institution. A dedicated category should be created in the application forms, allowing applicants to identify as a researcher at risk.
- Evaluation criteria should be adjusted: more openness in the evaluation process to non-linear career tracks would enhance the application prospects of researchers at risk. Evaluators and selection committees should be trained on the situation of researchers at risk. If possible, funding should be earmarked for a number of researchers at risk, potentially deploying funds from synergies with different European funding programmes and instruments.

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions should implement the **MSCA Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk** when recruiting researchers, and provide accompanying measures, such as career guidance and training. The latter should include information about EU and national fellowship and research programmes.

5. Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk

Beyond emergency support, policies, support structures and funding instruments at European, national and institutional level should have a stronger focus on enhancing social and professional mobility of researchers at risk. This would bring benefits to the researchers and their countries of residence, and also enhance the impact and sustainability of measures.

Beyond their initial placement, many researchers at risk would benefit from consecutive arrangements, ideally employment or another grant, which would also enhance their professional and personal standing in their host countries. This is a major precondition for their personal and professional success, well-being and sustained social mobility.

European and national policy levels

National and European programmes should support the professional and personal inclusion of researchers at risk and their families into host environments with dedicated funding. Targeted support and integration measures should be included into grant programmes, enabling hosts to offer tailored support to enhance long-term career prospects of researchers at risk.

European and national support programmes could also directly offer capacity building, information and materials, and peer-learning for current and future host institutions in this matter. National-level **migrant integration programmes** could either include researchers at risk directly or serve as a model for related programmes specific to at-risk researchers.

When designing support measures for the professional integration and inclusion of researchers at risk, governments should collaborate with a wider range of relevant stakeholders, particularly host institutions,

employment agencies and employer networks, municipalities and NGOs.

Higher education institutions

Universities should consider the integration needs and post-placement plans beyond the initial placement period. This can be done by:

- designating both an academic and an administrative mentor and ensuring that they are adequately trained and supported;
- providing for the researchers' guidance and information on academic and research cultures, and programmes;
- offering access to (local) language training;
- providing career guidance for researchers at risk and their partners, including information on employment procedures and visa requirements, schooling, or childcare support;
- encouraging networking with fellow researchers for mutual learning, and also in view of enhancing collaboration, such as for joint research proposals;
- adapting and supplementing existing measures to welcome and include international researchers (where they exist) with support specifically tailored to the needs of at-risk researchers.

Host institutions should make use of the **information and advice provided by national and international initiatives** on how to host a researcher, how to support their professional integration and inclusion, and how to prepare them for a transition into further employment. Exchanges among institutions could further mutual learning and sharing of resources.

6. Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk

European, national, and institutional support measures and initiatives should enable researchers at risk to explore the wider labour market extending beyond higher education institutions, engaging them in the thus far underused opportunities available in the private sector and industry.

Researchers at risk provide a diverse pool of international talent. Their qualifications and skills are of high value and interest to a wide range of public and private employers, beyond higher education and research institutions which are often their entry point in Europe.

Employing and otherwise supporting researchers at risk should align with those corporate social responsibility (CSR) and diversity and inclusion programmes that many private companies have in place.

European and national policy levels

European and national policy levels should support awareness raising amongst the private sector about the benefits and opportunities to hire international talent with an at-risk background, and provide concrete, practical information on visa requirements and procedures, for instance via national employment services. An EU talent pool and matchmaking platform for third country nationals and European employers on the European cooperation network of employment services (EURES) platform, as **proposed by the European Parliament**, would also be useful for researchers at risk.

Existing EU-wide initiatives such as Employers Together for Integration and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships should work with organisations supporting researchers at risk to incorporate measures for the recruitment and inclusion of researchers at risk.

European and national policymakers should encourage existing programmes for refugee integration to extend to researchers at risk. Although most researchers at risk enter Europe via labour pathways (rather than international protection), existing national and European initiatives assisting refugees could be expanded to include opportunities for researchers at risk. Such initiatives could provide matchmaking between researchers at risk and companies, as well as information and training on European (research) employment markets, CV drafting support, skills training, mentoring and other support.

European and national policies and programmes should incentivise non-academic employers to take concrete measures, such as those outlined below, to expand employment opportunities for researchers at risk.

Employment outside of universities and research institutes

For private sector, non-academic employers there is much to gain from engaging with the diverse talent pool of highly skilled at-risk researchers. Companies, NGOs, local authorities and other employers should consider the following measures:

- Include researchers at risk into recruitment strategies: Companies should partner with organisations supporting researchers at risk to extend the reach of their recruitment processes. Such partnerships could be realised within the framework CSR programmes to maintain talent pipelines and market competitiveness.
- Offer skills training and mentoring: Companies, local authorities, and other employers should provide skills training and mentoring to support researchers' transition from academia into other sectors.

- Offer dedicated placements: For several decades, higher education institutions around the world have offered dedicated placements for researchers at risk. Other employers should create similar hosting schemes.

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions already hosting researchers at risk can assist them with the transition to other sectors through provision of information and advice, as part of their institution's existing career services, or by referring researchers to specialised services for further support.

Higher education institutions hosting researchers at risk should offer opportunities for researchers to engage in university-business partnerships. This could help to expand opportunities outside of academia for researchers at risk, by making their skills more transferrable and supporting networking with private sector representatives.

In the context of a precarious academic labour market in Europe, host institutions also have a role to play in ensuring researchers at risk are fully aware of the challenging work environment and employment frameworks for all researchers across Europe. This may include providing clear information about the shortage of tenured positions, proliferation of short-term contracts, the sector's expectations for high levels of researcher mobility, and the high percentage of PhD graduates who work outside of academia. This will allow researchers at risk to make fully informed decisions about whether to focus energies on remaining in academia or whether to invest more effort in career opportunities in other sectors.

7. Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk

European, national and institutional support for researchers at risk should consider the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual identity, amongst other categories, to ensure better inclusion of at-risk researchers in Europe.

Researchers at risk in Europe may face a number of disadvantages when entering the European labour market in addition to their at-risk situation: their ethnic and migration background, legal issues related to visa or protection status, non-western education and employment record, career breaks due to their at-risk situation – and especially for women researchers – family responsibilities and gender gaps at the postgraduate level in regions of origin. Policies addressing at-risk researchers through a lens of intersectionality should encourage a multiple-matrix perspective that integrates single axis categories such as nationality, gender, ethnicity, and class.

European and national policy levels

National and European support programmes for researchers at risk should address the intersectional challenges faced by their applicants. They should acknowledge the structural interconnectedness of risks with various forms of oppression that may also be experienced in host contexts, such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, language discrimination, and discrimination based on religion or belief. Intersectionality needs to

be considered in the selection procedures for fellowships as well as in follow-on support mechanisms. This means taking into account the specific situation of each applicant, including applicants with non-traditional career pathways, in addition to their at-risk background. Special efforts should also be made to address “intersectional invisibility” as it affects at-risk researchers, including gender minority candidates.

In addition to direct funding for placements, programmes should also include or offer cost coverage for support such as childcare, post-trauma therapy/treatment, and dedicated guidance such as career re-entry schemes and peer support groups.

European and national-level intersectional approaches to at-risk researchers should also encourage more cross references between category-specific action plans, leading to greater policy coherence and more administrative awareness of complementary or parallel programmes.

Higher education institutions

Dimensions of intersectionality are often already addressed in institutions’ equity/equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies. A concrete link to researchers at risk needs to be established in institutional strategic documents, activities, and structures that consider aspects of intersectionality.

Internal selection and appointment committees should receive training on intersectionality to avoid biases with regard to researchers at risk, and to ensure successful and inclusive placements that recognise that there may not be a one-size fits all approach.

8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk

Researchers at risk access Europe primarily via researcher or scientific visas, but in some cases via international protection pathways. European and national authorities should expedite visa applications and expand complementary pathways to protection in order to facilitate access for researchers at risk to employment opportunities in Europe.

While some researchers at risk have recognised refugee or other protection status, most are outside the refugee process, seeking or holding temporary visas and work permits through visiting researcher positions at host institutions in Europe or elsewhere. The use of complementary pathways for researchers at risk needs to be scaled up, and European governments should act on the commitments they have already made.

European and national policy levels

All EU countries should fully implement the Students and Researchers' Directive (2016/801), which sets out the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of research.

The directive facilitates access to Europe for researchers at risk and their families, particularly in view of enhanced mobility within the EU, family reunification rights, and maximum processing times for visa applications. Current differences in how EU member states transpose the directive into national legislation should be minimised.

In addition to respecting the maximum processing times set out in the Students and Researchers Directive, the processing of researcher visas should be further expedited for researchers at risk and their families, who demonstrate proof of an existing host institution, job, or sponsor. Host institutions should also be able to submit supporting documentation (hosting agreement, employment contract, etc.) on the researcher's behalf with the researcher's permission.

Peer-learning between government officials and visa authorities across countries in Europe should be facilitated and encouraged to improve practices. Relevant ministries in European member states (Education, Research, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Home Affairs, Justice) should systematically cooperate with national or international support organisations for researchers at risk to ensure broad awareness and smooth functioning of visa procedures for researchers and scholars using a complementary legal pathway. Such arrangements can be diverse, as responses to Afghanistan and Ukraine illustrate.

In situations where very significant numbers of scholars are facing severe, immediate risks, such as in Afghanistan, a variety of pathways to safety (in addition to the usual researcher visa pathway) need to be deployed. In severe situations, European governments should waive any intent-to-return and home residency requirements that may apply to visa applications for at-risk scholars and researchers for the foreseeable future.

The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in March 2022 in the context of Ukraine is a welcome measure that greatly eases access for researchers from Ukraine to safety, residency, and employment in European academic and non-academic sectors.

National authorities should undertake concrete measures to keep Ukrainian scholars in higher education and research during a period of enforced exile. Consideration also needs to be given to the situation facing non-Ukrainian scholars and the question of their safe return. This includes scholars from Russia and Belarus who were resident in Ukraine in February 2022, but who fall outside the scope of the TPD.

Higher education institutions & other employers

To ensure the timely processing by visa authorities of researcher or scientific visas for researchers at risk, higher education institutions and other employers should expedite internal processes to provide the necessary supporting documentation to invited researchers, including job offers, hosting agreements and any other required documents.

Representatives from human resources, international offices and other departments with expertise in inviting international scholars to campus, should share expertise with other institutions in their countries vis-a-vis facilitating visa processes for researchers at risk.

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Annex: Further information and resources

The following provides a range of definitions, examples and background information for each of the policy recommendations, including links to policy documents, resources for further reading, training materials and other online resources.

Background

Who are researchers at risk?

Researchers at risk include researchers, scholars, scientists at all stages of their research careers, from doctoral candidates to experienced researchers and professors, who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or research career, and those who are displaced because of such threats.

While some researchers at risk have recognised refugee, asylum, or similar protection status, a more significant proportion of those seeking the assistance of NGOs specialising in the field of scholar protection are *outside* the refugee process, seeking or holding temporary visas or work permits through visiting research/scholar positions at host universities in Europe or elsewhere, outside their home countries.

Why are researchers at risk?

The global Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) reports that although each individual researcher's situation is unique, clear patterns have emerged within the 6,000+ applications for assistance SAR has received since its founding in 2000. The kinds of risk identified by SAR include:

- risk due to the content of a scholar's work, research, or teaching being perceived as threatening by authorities or other groups. When the development of ideas, exchange of information, and expression of new opinions are considered threatening, individual scholars/researchers are particularly vulnerable.

- risk because of the individual's status as an academic/researcher. Because of their education, frequent travel, and professional standing, scholars are often prominent members of their community. Where a scholar is a member of a political, ethnic, or religious minority, a woman, or a member of LGBTQ+ communities, an attack on an individual scholar may be a highly visible and efficient means for intimidating and silencing others.
- risk as a result of their peaceful exercise of basic human rights, in particular, the right to freedom of expression or freedom of association.
- risk as a result of conflict, situational violence, and natural disasters.

Who threatens researchers?

Researchers report threats by a range of state and non-state actors. These may include armed groups in conflict, armed militant, paramilitary, and extremist groups, police and military forces, government authorities, and members of the researcher's own higher education communities. Further distinction may be made between: (a) any of the above actors that threaten everyone within the society, including researchers and scholars; (b) actors that target researchers and scholars specifically; and (c) actors that target individual researchers/scholars.

Why is further support needed for researchers at risk in Europe?

The Inspireurope report **Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response** shows that there is excellent work already underway in Europe in support of researchers at risk. A number of NGOs and support organisations partner with higher education institutions across Europe to arrange temporary positions for researchers at risk to enable them to continue their work safely. However, as shown in the report, applications for assistance from at-risk scholars and researchers far exceed available funding for positions. Every year, there are many more qualified candidates seeking positions through these organisations than there is funding to provide.

Although a number of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020-funded projects provide very valuable support to institutions and organisations supporting researchers at risk, there is currently no dedicated European-level fellowship mechanism for researchers at risk. As outlined below, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and European Research Council (ERC) fellowship programmes in their current formats are not accessible to most researchers at risk. EU-funded support for human rights defenders (HRDs) has supported a few researchers at risk, primarily through the European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights (EIDHR) emergency grants and ProtectDefenders.eu. However, there has not been a widespread use of these options, primarily due to their eligibility criteria and the relatively modest scale and amount of the grants (approximately 10,000 euro per candidate).

Through studies and consultations, Inspireurope has explored the situation of researchers at risk in Europe, finding that many researchers at risk are also supported by international fellow academics and their universities. European universities are one of their main destinations. Fellowships and placements help researchers and their families, but they also render benefit to their host institutions, the research communities and to societies and economies at large.

For Europe, supporting researchers at risk is also a matter of demonstrating and defending its values such as academic freedom, diversity and inclusion, and protecting and promoting democracy, both within Europe, and in global exchanges. These issues receive growing recognition in European and national policy documents, but require swift and systematic action. It is clear that Europe must do more, as in many countries conditions for researchers are worsening.

Europe's support to researchers at risk would demonstrate its commitment to values such as academic freedom. In addition, international talent will contribute to European societies and economies.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Supporting researchers at risk is a matter of defending academic freedom and protecting diversity, equity and inclusion

What is academic freedom, and how does it link to researchers at risk?

Academic freedom is defined as “the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.” (**UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-education Teaching Personnel, p. 57 (1997)**).

“Freedom of scientific research is related to freedom of expression, freedom of association, the freedom of movement and the right to education, among other rights. It encompasses the right to freely define research questions, choose and develop theories, gather empirical material and employ sound academic research methods, to question accepted wisdom and bring forward new ideas. It entails the right to share, disseminate and publish the results thereof openly, including through training and teaching. It is the freedom of researchers to express their opinion without being disadvantaged by the system in which they work or by governmental or institutional censorship and discrimination. It is also the freedom to associate in professional or representative academic bodies. Freedom of scientific research needs opportunities for physical and virtual mobility in pursuit of one’s research work, requires a culture of gender equality and the freedom to interact with students and colleagues. Freedom of scientific research is informed by the standards of academic disciplines. At the same time,

it enables researchers to challenge these standards when and if new research results begin to question their current validity. Any limitation on the freedom of scientific research must be still compatible with the nature of this right and be determined through regular procedures of the rule of law. Scholars’ exercise of rights derived from the freedom of scientific research must take into account the rights of others.” (**Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, p.2 (2021)**)

An even more detailed definition and reflection on academic freedom can be found in the **Annex I to the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué** of the EHEA.

The free online course “**Dangerous Questions: Why Academic Freedom Matters**” explains why defending academic freedom is important, not only to academics, but to all of society. The course explains how academic freedom relates to other higher education and societal values, and the threats or challenges to these values that arise in different contexts. It offers practical suggestions as to how people, including students and academics can promote and defend academic freedom and related values. The course was developed by Scholars at Risk and the University of Oslo in the realm of the EU-funded Academic Refuge Project.

How are academic freedom and the support for researchers at risk reflected in European policy documents?

Freedom of research and academic freedom are essential preconditions to world-class research. This is recognised in a number of recent policy documents:

In their **2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué**, ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) commit to upholding academic freedom in their countries, and “(...) reaffirm [their] commitment to promoting and protecting our shared fundamental values in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation as the necessary basis for quality learning, teaching and research as well as for democratic societies.” (p.5).

The **Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research** (2021) underlines that “freedom of scientific research is a universal right and public good. It is a core principle of the European Union and as such anchored in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. (...) Research and the freedom to conduct research are indispensable prerequisites for our social, cultural, political and economic resilience and progress.” Signatory countries of the declaration commit to “continue to strengthen academic freedom and institutional autonomy coupled with long-term as well as reliable and stable institutional financing as necessary prerequisites for freedom of scientific research.” The Declaration also states: “We are committed to solidarity with researchers around the globe whose right to freedom of scientific research is violated”.

The Strategic forum for international scientific and technological cooperation (**SFIC Opinion on the implementation of the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research in International Cooperation in Research and Innovation** (2021) underlines that “ (...) freedom of scientific research is a universal value and prerequisite for our global problem-solving capacity” (p.2) and makes suggestions on how to operationalise the goals set out in the Bonn Declaration. It supports the Inspireurope call for a **dedicated European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk**.

In its 2022 Communication on a **European Strategy for Universities**, the European Commission underlines that academic freedom is part and parcel of the European way of life that higher education and research support. It acknowledges that the “numbers of scholars and researchers at risk in European neighbourhood are on the rise” and states that in close cooperation with the stakeholders and the Member States, it will provide “[s]upport for researchers at risk with guiding principles for universities to facilitate their inclusion” (p. 10). Placing academic freedom at the core of all EU higher education policies, the EC proposes a number of actions to promote and protect academic freedom and support researchers at risk as part of promoting European democratic values.

In the context of the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the members of the Bologna Follow up Group of the EHEA released a **statement** calling on all members and consultative members of the EHEA to “offer refuge and provisional work opportunities for academic staff who have to flee Ukraine or who cannot return” (p. 2).

How are academic freedom and attacks on researchers monitored?

On request of the ministers signing the **2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué**, the Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG) is currently developing “(...) a framework for the enhancement of the fundamental values of the EHEA that will foster self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning across national authorities, higher education institutions and organisations, while also making it possible to assess the degree to which these are honoured and implemented in our systems.” (p. 5).

Such efforts, alongside exploration of new tools and systems for monitoring in the European Research Area (ERA) should build on existing monitoring efforts including the **Free to Think report series**, the annual reports of SAR’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, which analyses attacks on higher education communities around the world and the GPPI-developed **Academic Freedom Index** which monitors key elements in the de facto realisation of academic freedom: (1) freedom to research and teach; (2) freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; (3) institutional autonomy; (4) campus integrity; and (5) freedom of academic and cultural expression.

Where can I find more resources about implementing equity, diversity and inclusion in a university setting?

Inclusiveness has become a strategic question for most higher education institutions across Europe, impacting learning and teaching, research and institutional cultures, and many institutions hosting researchers at risk do so as part of their diversity and inclusion strategies. The report **Diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions: results from the INVITED project** (2019) provides an overview and examples of how universities address this topic in practice.

A commitment to inclusion is also apparent at the European policy level. EHEA ministers signing the **2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué** state that “Socially inclusive higher education will remain at the core of the EHEA and will require providing opportunities and support for equitable inclusion of individuals from all parts of society” (p. 5) and adopted the **Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA**.

Recommendation 2: Establish a dedicated European fellowship scheme

How would a European fellowship programme for researchers at risk work?

The Inspireurope draft **Recommendation for a dedicated EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk** proposes a detailed outline of the potential format, organisation and implementation of a European programme in three distinct tracks, including proposals for eligibility criteria; application, selection and recruitment procedures; scale, cost and duration of the support measures, and an outline of stakeholders involved in the implementation. The document also provides further background information on the need for such a scheme.

Recommendation 3: Establish national support programmes for researchers at risk

What are good practice examples of national fellowship programmes and how can they be replicated in other European countries?

There is no one-size fits all approach to organising a national-level initiative. The Inspireurope report **Researchers at Risk: National-level Actions** gathers examples of national-level initiatives in Europe supporting researchers at risk.

It distinguishes the following approaches for national support programmes that could be adapted in other countries:

- Government-backed programmes, which provide fellowships and other direct support for researchers at risk. Germany and France are the main host countries for researchers and scholars in exile within the European Union. In this regard the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s **Philip Schwartz Initiative**, which is mainly supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, and the **PAUSE programme**, initiated and funded by the French Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation are good examples.
- Partnerships with national education/development agencies: In Finland, fellowship activities are supported through a partnership between the **Finnish National Education Agency** and the international **Scholar Rescue Fund**, while in Sweden, fellowships are provided by the **Swedish International Development Agency** and implemented by the **Scholars at Risk Sweden** section.

- Partnerships with NGOs and international networks: In the UK, where activities to support researchers at risk have been led by the Council for At-risk Academics (Cara), as well as in 12 other European countries, higher education institutions and associations have partnered with the Scholars at Risk Network to form national SAR sections to organise activities in support of researchers at risk.

The Inspireurope project advises national agencies, ministries, higher education institutions and other stakeholders on good practices for developing national support programmes. Contact information available [here](#).

Recommendation 4: Facilitate access of researchers at risk to existing EU-funding programmes

Why do European funding programmes need to be adapted?

The Inspireurope report **Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response** highlights the obstacles faced by researchers at risk when applying to European funding programmes open to all researchers (Chapter 2.4). Programmes such as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and its Individual Fellowships and the European Research Council (ERC) funds are not accessible to most researchers at risk due to their rules and conditions (for instance, mobility rules cannot be met by researchers at risk, or career breaks due to their at-risk situation cannot be considered etc.). Detailed recommendations on adapting eligibility and evaluation criteria, as well as communications and outreach can be found on the Inspireurope website [here](#).

Where can further information be found for researchers at risk wishing to apply to European programmes, and host institutions that wish to support them in this?

Awareness of and participation in European Union programmes could be enhanced by providing more targeted information to researchers at risk, and by offering guidance and support for applications. Guidance for researchers at risk on accessing existing schemes is provided in the webinars **How to apply for an EU-funded research fellowship** (January 2020), and **Mobility within Europe for researchers at risk** Mobility (March 2020), and the **FAQs on EU funded research fellowships for researchers at risk**.

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk** provide a number of recommendations to institutional beneficiaries of MSCA on how to widen access for researchers at risk.

Recommendation 5: Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk

Inspireurope and other EU (co-)funded projects offer a number of training and guidance materials on how to enhance long-term career prospects for researchers at risk. These include:

- How to Host**, (SAR 2019)
- Pathways to Practice, A Practitioner's Tool, Welcoming at risk scholars to campus** (Egner & Catoni 2017)
- Trainings on Mentoring Refugee Researchers** (BRIDGE project 2018-20)
- How to Host Training Curriculum** (Academic Refuge Project 2018)
- Livret d'accueil, A l'attention des établissements** (Programme national d'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil PAUSE 2019)
- Inspireurope webinars**

- **Welcoming researchers at risk: considerations for new employers and host organisations in Europe (2020)**
- **Funding researchers at risk to join the host organisation (2020)**
- **Hosting Researchers at Risk: How employers and hosts can help researchers make the most of their stay (2020)**
- **Webinar for employers and host organisations: Psychosocial support for researchers at risk (2021)**

Recommendation 6: Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk

Where can companies, NGOs, and other non-academic sector employers find out more about supporting researchers at risk?

Companies interested in getting involved may contact the Inspireurope project. Inspireurope aims also at increasing employment and career development opportunities for researchers at risk beyond universities and research institutions, for instance in the private sectors and in industry. The Inspireurope briefing **Opportunities in industry in Europe for researchers at risk** provides an overview of opportunities for companies, enterprise networks and industry representatives to get involved in these efforts.

Organisations providing direct support to researchers at risk, such as the Scholars at Risk Network, the Council for Assisting At-Risk Academics, the Scholar Rescue Fund, the Philipp Schwartz Initiative, the French National PAUSE programme, and others are engaged in matchmaking activities between researchers at risk and higher education institutions, and are also interested in assisting researchers at risk for careers beyond academia.

The EU co-funded **CARe** project, demonstrated the need for greater awareness in the private sector of the presence of a diverse and largely untapped talent pool of researchers at risk.

Where can researchers at risk find advice about careers beyond academia?

The Inspireurope webinar **Careers outside Academia** (November 2021) examines alternative career paths open to researchers at risk considering a move from academia into the non-profit or private sectors.

What is the potential “EU talent pool for third country nationals” and would it be useful to researchers at risk?

The potential talent pool is part of a set of proposals of the European Parliament (EP) to the European Commission (EC) and its **Resolution of 25 November 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on legal migration policy and law**. The EP requests that the EC “(...) Considers [...] the creation of a Union talent pool for third-country nationals who wish to apply for work with a view to migrating legally to a Member State, as well as for Union-based employers to search for potential employees in third countries, (...)” (p. 8). Such a platform and matchmaking tool is suggested to be offered via the already existing **EURES Portal** (European cooperation network of employment services). The EP furthermore “(...)[r]equests that the Commission include in its proposal the establishment of a transnational advisory service network, to be managed by the Commission, for legally migrating third-country workers, with each Member State designating a lead authority to process applications and to coordinate the advice and information provided to third-country nationals applying for work in the Union or already holding a work permit; insists that the lead authorities should be responsible for sharing information among Member States on third-country workers, should act as contact points for workers and employers with regard to the talent pool and should provide relevant information to third-country nationals interested in migrating legally to the Union for work (...)” (p. 10).

Such a platform could be useful to researchers at risk still in their home countries, and those who have had to leave their home countries but who are not yet in employment. The platform may be especially useful to those looking for careers outside academia where the usual scientific/research visa pathway might not apply.

Are there examples of initiatives that match researchers at risk with employers outside academia?

While organisations supporting researchers at risk assist individual researchers with transitions to positions outside of academia on a case-by-case basis, there is currently no dedicated initiative specifically matchmaking researchers at risk with employers outside of academia on a larger scale.

However, existing initiatives to match refugees with employers could provide useful models for future initiatives to place researchers at risk. Inspireurope is encouraging existing initiatives for refugees to consider opening their programmes for participation by researchers at risk, outside of the refugee process.

As an example, the Netherlands-based **Refugee Talent Hub** brings together refugees and employers in the Netherlands. Crucially, beyond matchmaking, it offers a range of services such as company visits, trainings and courses for up- or re-skilling, work experience programs and other work-related activities. The hub initially was created by the Dutch branch of **Accenture**, a professional services company. Other national level initiatives focus on recruiting highly skilled migrants and refugees into areas that face labour shortages, such as the Swedish **Jobbsprånget** (with a focus on engineering, architecture, business or science graduates). The four-month-long internship programme run by the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA) matches refugees with Swedish employers in need of specific competence and experience. The international NGO **Tent Partnership for Refugees** mobilises the global business community to employ refugees or to support them in other ways, and currently reaches out to over 200 major companies. Inspireurope is encouraging all such initiatives to widen access for researchers at risk to these opportunities.

Recommendation 7: Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk

Are there examples of policy approaches that consider intersectionality?

The **George Washington University Intersectionality Research Institute** (GW IRI) and the **Center for Intersectional Justice** in Berlin offer a number of relevant resources, including publications relating to intersectionality and structural inequality, quantitative and qualitative approaches to intersectionality, and descriptive and experiential analyses of intersectionality.

The GW IRI enumerates the benefits of intersectionality for research, policy and practice as including:

- Access to “...the advantages of multiple ‘matrix’ (e.g., gender, race, sexual identity and class) perspectives for understanding the role of privilege and social inequality”.
- Ability to “make the experiences of ‘intersectionally invisible’ groups visible.”
- Capacity to “[c]enter the experiences of groups [such as at-risk researchers] marginalized by multiple and interlocking forms of oppression...”
- Scope to “[h]ighlight critical gaps in conventional logic, such as how research and policies developed for groups such as ‘women and minorities’ often neglect the experiences and needs of people who are...”

Additionally, **An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework** (Hankivsky, O. Ed., 2012) provides a helpful compendium of intersectionality-based policy analysis (IBPA) questions to help shape future policies around at-risk researchers in terms of IPBA principles such as intersecting categories, multi-level analysis, power, reflexivity, time and space, diverse knowledges, social justice, and equity.

Recommendation 8: Enhance visa pathways for international talent

What visa pathways do researchers at risk use to enter and reside in Europe?

Most researchers at risk enter Europe via a researcher/scientific visa. This is usually a long-stay visa, on the basis of a hosting agreement with a higher education or research institution in the host country. While the rights afforded under scientific/researcher visas vary across EU member states, in most countries there are provisions for family members to join the researcher.

For those who face risks in their home countries, the researcher/scientific visa pathway acts as a complementary pathway to protection, defined by UNHCR as “safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement resettlement by providing lawful stay in a third country where their international protection needs are met. They are additional to resettlement and do not substitute the protection afforded to refugees under the international protection regime. Complementary pathways include existing admission avenues that refugees may be eligible to apply to, but which may require operational adjustments to facilitate refugee access (UNHCR Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees – Key Considerations (2019, p. 5).” Due to their highly skilled background, researchers at risk often qualify for labour mobility schemes, “(...)” by which a person may enter or stay in another country through safe and regulated avenues for purposes of employment, with the right to either permanent or temporary residence.” (UNHCR online, 2022)

What is the European policy context for visas of researchers at risk?

The relevant EU directive addressing the mobility of third-country researchers is the **Directive (EU) 2016/801** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. The directive sets out several rules of relevance to researchers at risk. It provides for immediate family reunification for non-EU family members of non-EU researchers, access to the labour market and intra-EU mobility for researchers. An important provision in the directive, of particular value to researchers at risk, is permission to stay on in the territory for the purposes of job-seeking for a period of at least nine months following completion of their research. With regard to intra-EU mobility, the directive allows for mobility of up to six months per Member State without a notification procedure, and mobility for more than six months per Member State by notification or application. Unfortunately, however, there are important differences in how EU member states transpose the directive into national legislation.

Inspireurope welcomed the new EU Blue Card rules introduced in September 2021 to create more flexible criteria for entry to the EU by highly skilled third country nationals. While some researchers at risk can meet the prerequisites for an EU Blue Card, many were unable to meet the salary threshold criteria under the previous rules. The reduction in the salary threshold under the new rules should broaden access to more academics.

Further information and resources on visa pathways to Europe for researchers at risk, including links to the relevant national information on researcher/scientific visas, is available on the Inspireurope [website](#).

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