

Researchers at Risk in MSCA
Preliminary assessment of current obstacles & related suggestions

MSCA eligibility criteria:

- 1) **MSCA mobility rules:** The standard MSCA fellowship criteria state that the researcher cannot have resided or carried out his/her main activity in the country of the beneficiary for more than 12 months in the three years immediately before the call deadline. However, given the time and conditions required to prepare a competitive MSCA individual fellowship application, an at-risk researcher is often best placed to apply for such a fellowship when they are out of immediate danger, and temporarily in a more stable situation. For example, a candidate who is already in a first or second 1-year temporary placement within a SAR member university in Europe or elsewhere, or at a German university in receipt of a two-year Philipp Schwartz Initiative fellowship, or at a French university in receipt of a PAUSE fellowship, is usually in a better position to apply for an MSCA fellowship than someone who is still facing risks in Syria or Turkey. If such candidates are already in the second year of their temporary placement, they are not eligible to apply for an MSCA fellowship, but these may be the very candidates who are more likely to submit competitive applications.

Suggestion: Might the current exception that applies to those in the process of obtaining refugee status be extended also to those identifying as ‘at-risk’ but who are *outside* the asylum-seeking process? (Many researchers at risk are in “hosting agreements”/temporary visiting researcher positions at universities across Europe with temporary visas, and not in the refugee process.) If the mobility rule allowed for 24 months residency (instead of 12 months) in the country of the beneficiary in the preceding three years, this should open the opportunity to more competitive researchers at risk. If it were extended further to allow 36 months in the preceding five years, this would be even better, enabling those who need additional time to stabilize their situation in the host country (in order to take language classes, find accommodation, jobs for spouses, schools for children etc.) to retain eligibility to apply.

- 2) **Timeline for applications:** One intake per year with an approximate six-month gap between the time of application and the decision makes it unlikely that those facing immediate risks will be availing of the mechanism as an emergency opportunity. Other fellowship programmes or international networks, and universities themselves will need to continue filling this urgent gap with their own fellowships.

Suggestion: A second annual intake would mean more candidates might benefit. An alternative might be an ad-hoc procedure for researchers at risk on the basis of a quota (up to a certain number of scholarships per year). We understand that this would require a major overhaul of the current peer review process and evaluation system which we presume is unlikely to occur in the near-term but wished to include mention of this important obstacle for researchers at risk and a possible longer-term measure to consider.

- 3) **Joint nature of applications:** For some researchers at risk who do not have strong pre-existing contacts or networks within Europe, it is challenging for them to find a supervisor for their MSCA project.

