Remote Fellowships for Researchers at Risk: A Brief Guide

Summary: Remote fellowships provide flexible ways of supporting researchers at risk who, for various reasons, might not be able to be physically present at a host campus. Researchers at risk include researchers, scholars, and scientists at all stages of their careers who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or research career, and those who have been displaced because of such threats.[1] The aim of this brief guide is to raise awareness of the opportunities that remote fellowships offer, and to provide interested researchers and potential host institutions with some ideas to implement their own schemes. The brief guide also highlights key issues to be considered to ensure success and mutual benefit for researchers and host institutions. The short guide was produced by the University of Gothenburg as part of the EU-funded Inspireurope+ project.[2] It builds on the experience of existing remote fellowship initiatives, and in particular the results of the Inspireurope+ webinar on *Remote Fellowships for Researchers at Risk* (December 8th 2022), which is available on the Inspireurope+ website.

What is a remote fellowship?

A remote fellowship is a professional development opportunity that usually lasts from several weeks to a number of years in which a researcher has an affiliation with a host organization without the researcher being physically located at the host campus.

In which situations can a remote fellowship be useful to researchers at risk?

> *"I was waiting to die academically. I feel I returned to academia again… It might be a small contribution from your university, but this will definitely change their lives."* –Researcher at risk recipient of a remote fellowship

The majority of researchers and scholars assisted by the organisations in the Inspireurope+ consortium are in temporary placements (usually 1 to 2 years in duration) at higher education institutions outside of their home countries. However, depending on the individual researcher's situation and the capacity of the host institution, a remote fellowship can be a viable and, in some cases, preferable, alternative to more traditional hosting arrangements. Such situations might include where there are the following conditions:

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[1] See Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response, Report of the Inspireurope Project, 2020, p. 11, available at: https://sareurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Inspireurope-Report-Researchers-at-Risk-Mapping-Europes-Response.pdf

[2] Inspireurope+ is funded by the European Commission's Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), Horizon Europe.

- ➢ Targeted dismissals and/or restricted access to information. This includes situations where a scholar is prohibited from research and academic activity at a particular institution, dismissed, or limited in their research in any other way.[3]
- ➢ Travel restrictions. This includes when a researcher's travel is restricted due to travel bans, lack of travel documentation, by restrictions placed upon family, as well as when researchers are in hiding.
- ➢ Displacement. This includes when scholars are internally displaced or are residing in a neighbouring country or other third country and without research connections, affiliations, or supports in their new country of residence.
- ➢ Conflict/emergencies. This includes when there is disruption, damage, or the destruction of higher education and research infrastructure in a scholar's home country. Remote fellowships in these situations can be particularly useful to help individual scholars contribute to rebuilding the capacity of higher education institutions in the home country.
- ➢ Supporting multiple researchers. Host organisations sometimes lack funding to support on-campus fellowships. Remote fellowships may be a viable alternative to supporting some, or additional, researchers in such contexts. In such cases a remote initiative will still require staff time and in-kind contributions to be successful. However, they will also allow these institutions to mobilise for academic freedom, demonstrate solidarity, and benefit from the knowledge and expertise of researchers at risk in ways not previously possible.
- ➢ A complement to hosting on campus. Remote fellowships can also be used as a complement to hosting a researcher at risk on campus; this may include periods of transitional time prior to, or following, a traditional on-campus hosting arrangement.

What are the benefits of remote fellowships?

"To reach databases and digital tools is the biggest benefit. It gives us the opportunity to continue our research and to collaborate with the hosting institution." – Researcher at risk recipient of a remote fellowship

For **researchers**, a remote fellowship can offer the following benefits:
- ➢ A means to continue ongoing projects in research and education, as well as to embark on new research.
- ➢ Access to digital resources within the host institution, including institutional e-mail and library books, databases, and journals.
- ➢ Support provided without having to engage in complicated visa-related procedures.
- ➢ Institutional affiliation, which is often key for seeking opportunities to publish and participate in peer academic fora. The aspect of institutional affiliation is mentioned frequently by researchers supported by organisations within the Inspireurope+ consortium as a crucial benefit of any fellowship.

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[3] For specific examples see the 2022 Scholars at Risk 2022 Free to Think Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, available at: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2022/

- A means of facilitating the continuation of professional activity through access to the host institution's online continuing professional development courses and trainings, including academic practice teaching and learning supports.
- A way to regain professional identity, to re-establish research and academic careers, and an opportunity to be re-integrated into professional life.
- A sense of belonging, community and hope for their future career.

For **host institutions**, a remote fellowship can offer the following benefits:
- Inclusion of the research expertise and academic experience of the at-risk scholar within their institutional community.
- Inclusion of the at-risk scholar in the writing of joint research proposals and publications.
- Fewer visa-related procedures to support, or possibly simplified procedures.
- The possibility of guest lectures by the at-risk scholar on relevant teaching modules, or at relevant faculty, student, or public events.
- In some cases, full study courses may be offered remotely by a guest researcher at risk, or with the scholar serving as part of a team or co-teaching approach to a subject.
- Increased internationalisation for the host institution.
- Increased contributions to widening participation approaches in the host institution, including efforts around diversity, equality, and inclusion.

Wider benefits:

> *"The program has been rewarding for both the University Library and the researchers…We realised, after much effort, that the Affiliate Researchers did not need to have a university ID card or a library patron account or barcode, as they are not checking out materials per se, but only needed access to online resources. At our university access requires a "single sign-on" from off-campus for network access that allows them to get into the network from behind a security firewall. That way they can get into the library website and all of our journals and online databases."* – Host institution administrator on remote fellowships

- Researchers may continue to contribute to advancing international research while still in their countries of origin.
- Remote fellowships may lead to strengthened cooperation between institutions, where institutional affiliations are retained in the home country, or neighboring country, and stronger inter-university partnerships.
- In some cases, remote fellowships may help to prevent 'brain drain' from a particular country or region by complementing brain circulation in similar ways to traditional hosting arrangements for researchers at risk.
- Remote fellowships may help build the capacities of home institutions, or institutions in a neighboring country if an institutional partner is involved. This is most pertinent in situations where continued affiliation with the home institution is possible.

How are remote fellowships are implemented in practice?

While remote fellowships can be organised in many ways, there are some basic issues that host institutions will need to consider. An agreement stipulating basic roles and responsibilities between the host and the scholar is strongly recommended. While not everything in a remote fellowship can and should be formally agreed and spelled out in advance, it is important to reach an agreement of what guest scholars and hosts expect from each other. Some clearly outlined tasks and commitments, involving communication and cooperation with peer researchers and students, make the fellowship more concrete, structured, and meaningful. This is important, as academic cultures around the globe are quite different, and the remote approach bears some additional risks for miscommunication around norms and expectations. A clear agreement on the basic terms from the outset is advisable.

How does mentoring and support work?

"I have an opportunity to have a mentor in the scholar. This is not only an opportunity of us helping scholars, but also for the scholar helping our institution through his expertise and experience." –
Host institution mentor on remote fellowships

Ideally, remote guest scholars should be supported by colleagues at the host institution in multiple ways. This may include the following:

➢ One or two mentors could offer regular meetings for informal exchanges, and act as 'local guides' to the institution by making individual introductions, answering informal questions, and encouraging opportunities to participate remotely in seminars and workshops.

➢ The remote researcher at risk could be introduced to relevant research groups or centres within the institution.

➢ The remote researcher at risk may be assigned an administrative contact to support with practical matters, including connecting to IT support.

➢ A student contact may also be invited, should the scholar agree to this, and if there is clear and mutual agreement on what kinds of signposting and assistance the researcher can expect the student to provide in relation to the culture of the hosting institution.

➢ The scholar should be included in invitations to online research seminars, conferences, and other digital events, and included in relevant mailing lists. It is important to ensure that there is a host unit or department responsible for integrating the scholar into the research community and tasked with assigning responsibilities for mentoring and support.

What institutional resources can host institutions offer?

Access to the host institution's resources is another key benefit of remote fellowships. Remote hosts will typically offer:

➢ A university email to the scholars, thus giving access to digital resources such as the library, databases, intranet and labs for continuation of academic activity.

➢ Opportunities for the scholars to publish work using the university affiliation.

➢ Career development opportunities and trainings

> ➢ Access to other institutional resources for affiliated scholars and researchers may be dependent upon the profile, discipline and interest of the remote researcher at risk. These may also be subject to contractual terms or background checks that accompany various laboratory and library databases. In order to manage expectations all around it is important to clarify access and offerings in the hosting arrangement.

How do funding & payments work?

Some remote fellowships include a stipend or salary, while others offer unpaid affiliations. It is important for the host institution to be clear from the outset whether the remote opportunity is paid or unpaid. Different funding models are used by host institutions; some provide compensation by numbers of hours/ days, others are a one-time fellowship or grant. Depending on the researcher's location, country context (particularly if there are sanctions), and the extent of the researcher's risk, the mechanics and security-related issues around sending/receiving a fellowship payment can pose significant challenges. In addition, but less difficult to address, there may be cross-border tax implications for host institutions and individuals to consider. Inspireurope+ partners are eager to learn more about how existing initiatives are dealing with the mechanics of payments to researchers at risk in different parts of the world in order to facilitate further sharing of experiences in this regard.

How to identify a researcher at risk for a remote fellowship?

> *The Inspireurope+ project is currently seeking examples and models of how remote schemes have addressed the mechanics of cross-border payments in specific country contexts. This will allow us to facilitate a greater sharing of experiences around what can be a serious barrier to the provision of remote fellowships. We invite you to contact us at inspireurope@mu.ie for a conversation in this regard.*

Some institutions publicly announce and promote their remote fellowship schemes. Others may discuss the possibility on a case-by-case basis with researchers they are in touch with directly, or through the mediation of faculty members. There is no one way to organize a remote fellowship. Below are a few examples:

> ➢ Faculty-contacts: Build upon and support already established contacts between a faculty at the host institution and a researcher at risk.
> ➢ Institutional partnership: Build upon or begin a partnership with an institution in the home country of the scholar.
> ➢ Nominations: Receive nominations from organisations supporting researchers at risk, including Scholars at Risk Network, Cara, Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, PAUSE: Programme National D'Accueil En Urgence Des Scientifiques En Exil, IIE Scholar Rescue Fund and other groups.
> ➢ Referrals: Receive referrals from other civil society organisations e.g. refugee organisations, artists organisations, human rights defenders organisations.

Should remote fellowships be country-specific?

Whether or not a fellowship can be taken up remotely will depend on the location of the scholar, the nature of the risk faced by the scholar, and their ability to continue their work

safely in the home country or region. Where possible, Inspireurope+ partners recommend maximum flexibility on the part of the host organisation regarding the country of origin of researchers. However, in some cases, funding for the remote fellowship scheme may be secured as part of a response to a specific country context. In these cases, the scheme might begin as a country-specific response but the learnings from the scheme could be applied later by the host organisation to a broader scheme for researchers from other countries.

What is the recommended duration of a remote fellowship?

Remote fellowships schemes can cover a set number of paid hours up to a period of several years. The duration should be clearly agreed between the researcher and the host organisation from the outset.

What are some typical activities for a researcher at risk under a remote fellowship?

Typical activities under remote fellowships schemes may include joint research; joint publications; research seminars; conferences; team teaching; co-supervision of students, lecturing dedicated modules and courses; offering topical seminars for students and staff.

How can the scholar's safety be ensured during the remote fellowship?

The individual security concerns of each scholar should be taken into consideration. For instance, the host institution needs to make sure that the scholar will not be easily identified during the fellowship if this puts them at risk or exposed to other risks by participating in the fellowship. Some of the same security-related questions for hosting scholars on campus will also need to be considered when hosting a scholar remotely.[4]

What status should the scholar have within the host institution?

Several options can usually be considered by host organisations, depending on the specific rules and conditions within the host institution. A few examples include: visiting scholar, guest professor, fixed-term contract, and affiliate researcher.

Preliminary list of remote fellowship examples:

Inspireurope+ is compiling examples of remote fellowship schemes for researchers at risk. We invite you to contact us with your examples at **inspireurope@mu.ie** so that, with your permission, we can share the information across organisations, or more widely via: https://sareurope.eu/inspireurope/inspireurope-resources/

> ➢ The Visiting Researcher - Scholars at Risk (SAR) Program at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU), Canada

The Visiting Researcher – Scholars at Risk Program at WLU is fully remote. The program is open to scholars at risk regardless of nationality, but all eligible scholars must be either nominated by a Laurier faculty member or through the SAR program. The term of the Visiting Researcher

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[4] See p. Scholars at Risk, How to Host, A Handbook for Higher Education Partners p.19-20 available at: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAR-How-to-Host-Handbook.pdf

appointment shall typically be two consecutive academic terms (nine months) and is non-renewable. Individuals granted Visiting Researcher status under the SAR program will have remote, internet-based access to the Wilfrid Laurier University Library and its available collections. In addition to access to Laurier library materials, a Visiting Researcher will typically participate in or conduct research of mutual interest with a Laurier researcher(s) and engage in collaborative research programs with Laurier faculty. Visiting Researchers under the SAR program are eligible to receive a one-time stipend of $10,000 (CAN).
https://www.wlu.ca/academics/research/research-services/assets/resources/visiting-researcher-scholars-at-risk.html

➢ Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

In 2022 Freie Universität offered short-term scholarships of up to 6 months to scholars fleeing from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus as an emergency response to Russia's war against Ukraine. Out of more than 70 scholarships, 25 have been attributed as remote scholarships to Ukrainian scholars who are still in Ukraine. The scholarships have allowed scholars to relocate from the war zone, to continue their work at a Ukrainian partner university, and to foster ties through research with scholars at Freie Universität.
https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/international/profile/university-culture-and-global-commitment/scholars-at-risk/index.htmlhttps://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/academicsinsolidarity/index.html

➢ Carleton University, Canada

The remote SAR program at Carleton was launched in 2020 and supports scholars at risk who are still in their home countries or a situation of transit. The program is open to researchers at risk regardless of nationality. Scholars are appointed for two years, renewable up to five years. Scholars are connected to a designated research unit and provided with a Carleton email address and access to library resources, which scholars can use to access resources and publish with an institutional affiliation. No additional funding is provided. The program can host up to five remote scholars in any given year. https://carleton.ca/scholars-at-risk/

➢ Scholar at Risk Ukraine (SARU) Remote Fellowships, SAR Denmark

In 2022 SAR-Denmark offered remote scholarships for researchers currently in Ukraine. The fellows are paid per activity, based on an hourly rate. The remote scholarship is only for researchers working for a university or research institution in Ukraine. These remote scholarships have included hosting online lectures and seminars for universities and research institutions within the SAR Denmark network. Payment is in the form of a one-off amount paid directly to the candidate for a maximum of 50 hours in 2022 and 25 hours in 2023. The fellows have played an active role in the research environment of SAR-Denmark member universities.
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/sections/sar-denmark/

➢ Remote fellowships: Ukraine

For remote fellowship schemes for researchers from Ukraine we recommend reviewing the Science4Ukraine listings at: https://scienceforukraine.eu/listings