

Recommendation for the establishment of national fellowship schemes for researchers at risk (December 2023)

Summary: As global leaders in the provision of support for researchers at risk, the [Inspireurope+](#) project partners recommend the establishment of national fellowship schemes across Europe and beyond to support researchers at risk.¹ These include researchers, scholars, scientists and other members of higher education communities who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or research career. Many have been displaced because of such threats. With authoritarian governments growing in number and actively working to restrict spaces for civil society and the free exercise of human rights, including academic freedom, significant numbers of scholars are seeking support from our organisations and from higher education institutions across Europe and beyond.² Scholars are reporting threats by a range of state and non-state actors, including armed militant and extremist groups, police and military forces, government authorities, and members of their own higher education communities.³ Some are at risk when the content of their work or teaching is deemed threatening to authorities, others due to their status as scholars and prominent members of their communities, others as a result of their peaceful exercise of basic human rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression or freedom of association. Every year applications for assistance, in particular for temporary research/academic positions in safe places, from at-risk scholars to our organisations far exceed available funding for positions. To address the shortfall in support, the Inspireurope project recommends the establishment of dedicated national fellowship schemes for researchers at risk. A proposed format for such schemes is summarised in this document.

Existing national schemes: European higher education institutions are already at the forefront of global efforts to support researchers at risk. Individual higher education institutions, in some cases with assistance from national fellowship schemes such as government-backed initiatives in France and Germany, are providing crucial, life-saving support to many scholars. Existing national fellowship schemes for researchers at risk provide excellent models for replication across the European Higher Education Area. Drawing on the experience of such schemes, new dedicated support programmes could be established in any number of formats, for example, government-backed support programmes, or partnerships between national education or development agencies and organisations dedicated to supporting researchers at risk, or partnerships with NGOs and international networks.

Further information and advice: Experts within the Inspireurope+ consortium are ready to advise and assist policymakers, ministries, national agencies, higher education institutions and research organisations, industry representatives, funders and other stakeholders interested in establishing national support schemes. Please contact us at inspireurope@mu.ie to set up a meeting. Further information and resources are provided below.

¹ Inspireurope+ is an EU-funded, multi-partner initiative to coordinate and strengthen support in Europe for researchers at risk. Inspireurope+ is coordinated by Scholars at Risk Europe, hosted at Maynooth University, Ireland. [Project partners](#) include the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the European University Association, the University of Gothenburg, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the French national PAUSE Programme at the Collège de France. Associate partners include the Council for at-risk academics, the Scholars at Risk Network, the Spanish Rectors' Conference and the Scholar Rescue Fund. Information about Inspireurope+ is available at: <https://sareurope.eu/inspireurope/>

² See Inspireurope+ publications available at: <https://sareurope.eu/inspireurope/inspireurope-publications-policy/> as well as the annual reports of organisations supporting at-risk scholars, in particular, the Council for at-risk academics, French national PAUSE programme, Scholar Rescue Fund, Scholars at Risk network, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Philipp Schwartz Initiative.

³ The latest annual report of Scholars at Risk's Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, *Free to Think 2023*, documents 409 attacks on scholars, students, and their institutions in 66 countries and territories, from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023.¹ It highlights situations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Mexico, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States. Available at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/free-to-think-reports/>



Proposed format of national fellowship schemes for researchers at risk

The Inspireurope+ consortium recommends the creation of national fellowship programmes with two tracks:

Track 1: Urgent placements for researchers at risk (*outside* the refugee process)

Track 2: Refugee researchers and follow-up placements for at-risk candidates outside refugee process

It is recommended that both fellowship tracks include direct support for researchers at risk and measures for their integration within the host institution and host country. A preparatory phase is recommended in order to develop a recruitment, vetting, evaluation and placement process. Three important procedures to be developed and established during such a preparatory phase would include:

1. Agree on process and develop any partnerships needed in order to assess risks faced by candidates who are outside the refugee process (for example, Scholars at Risk, the Council for At-Risk Academics, the Scholar Rescue Fund and the French national PAUSE programme provide assessments for existing national schemes);
2. Ideally develop a process for awarding a fellowship that is for a particular researcher, but paying the grant out to a host institution, *without* requiring the candidate to have identified the host institution at the time of application (there are existing models from NGOs supporting researchers at risk to follow for this proposed approach);
3. Agree on process and develop any partnerships needed for matching researchers with host institutions.

Track 1: Urgent placements for researchers at risk (*candidates outside the refugee process*)

(a) Proposed eligibility criteria

Essential:

- PhD holders (or highest degree in their field), and candidates who have initiated PhD studies but whose studies have been interrupted;
- Candidates experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or academic career, or those who are forced or have recently (*usually within 0-36 months*) been forced to leave their country because of such threats, but are *without* refugee or similar protection status (*see track 2 for scheme for these candidates*), and without citizenship or permanent residency in an EU member state;
- Candidates could apply from the home country, a third country or from an EU/EEA country. Candidates living in an EU/EEA country could be temporary residents or work permit holders in the EU/EEA but may not be in process of applying for asylum;
- Candidates demonstrating teaching and/or (doctoral) research experience at a research institution, university, college, or other institution of higher learning, or within the non-academic sector;
- Candidates demonstrating academic accomplishment or promise;
- Candidates could apply with an existing offer from a host institution (with or without co-funding), or with a request for assistance with placement at a suitable host institution;
- Candidates should have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities;
- Eligibility should ideally be open to candidates seeking to transition from the academic to non-academic sectors, but this will depend on capacity of the national scheme to assist in such cases.

Desirable (but might not be required for all schemes):

- Record of published research

- (b) **Application deadlines:** For this urgent track, 3 or 4 application deadlines per year recommended where possible.
- (c) **Recruitment of candidates:** The agreed process for recruitment will depend on funding available and anticipated numbers of applications. If funding is very modest, Inspireurope+ recommends relying on nominations of candidates by prospective host institutions, and referrals by organisations supporting scholars at risk. If significant funding is available to meet anticipated demand, recruitment could be via open call for applications for fellowships.
- (d) **Costs:** Salaries can range from €35K to €100K depending on the host country in Europe and experience level of the researcher. For track 1 (urgent placements) Inspireurope+ recommends budgeting for fully funded fellowships, including direct salary costs and all employers' costs. Amounts will differ by country and would be determined based on host country/institution researcher salary scales, employer's costs of host institution, and level of experience of the individual researcher (doctoral candidates through to full professors). Support for each fellow should if possible include relocation allowance, health insurance, school/childcare contributions, language classes, and conference/career development funds. Co-funded positions are also used by some national programmes as an incentive for host institutions to provide quality hosting for candidates, but may be more useful for less urgent placements, as they sometimes involve more case-by-case negotiations and can be more time-consuming to organise.
- (e) **Duration:** We recommend a minimum fellowship duration of 1 year, with an evaluation built-in in year 1 in order to facilitate fellowship renewals where possible, and an average duration of 2 years. The objective will be to buy the researcher time in a safe place, with a stable income to enable them to begin making independent job applications, to complete their PhD, and/or to return home should safety conditions allow.
- (f) **Evaluation process:** As mentioned above, a recruitment, vetting, evaluation and placement process would need to be established in a preparatory phase with time dedicated to these activities. A designated coordinating entity could have responsibility for receiving and evaluating applications, proposing and selecting successful applicants, with input from an advisory or steering committee and/or a roster of subject experts. In some cases experts could be sourced from within existing general pools of experts for other areas of national funding, combined with individuals/organisations with experience assisting researchers at risk.
- (g) **Placement & administration:** In existing national-level schemes in Europe, to simplify fellowship administration processes funding is often disbursed by the national scheme coordinator to the host institution (as is currently the case with Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) fellowships in Germany and PAUSE fellowships in France). As noted above, the process for arranging placements would need to be developed in the preparatory phase mentioned above. If management of the fellowship scheme is in partnership with organisations supporting researchers at risk, placements could be identified through a combination of (a) the researcher independently (b) organisations such as Cara, the Scholar Rescue Fund, or Scholars at Risk (SAR) or other partners with related expertise and (c) via an open call for hosts.

Track 2: Refugee researchers and follow-up placements for those outside refugee process

- (a) **Eligibility criteria**

Track 2 could have two sub-tracks.

a. Open to researchers who have proof of recognised refugee status, asylum status, or similar protection status, but who are without citizenship in an EU/EEA member state (including current or previous recipients of fellowships/placements for researchers at risk).

OR

b. Open to researchers who are outside the refugee process and without EU/EEA citizenship, and who are already in temporary positions at European universities (arranged independently or via organisations such as SAR, SRF, Cara, PSI or PAUSE), seeking follow-up positions, and who are experiencing or have experienced threats to their life, liberty, or academic career, or those who have recently been forced to leave their country because of such threats.

Proposed additional essential criteria:

- PhD holders (or highest degree in their field), and candidates who have initiated PhD studies but whose studies have been interrupted;
- Teaching and/or (doctoral) research experience at a research institution, university, college, other institution of higher learning, or within industry;
- Demonstrate academic accomplishment or promise;
- Candidates could apply with an existing offer from a host institution (with or without co-funding), or with a request for assistance with placement at a suitable host institution;
- Open to candidates seeking to transition from the academic to the non-academic sector;
- Candidates should have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities;
- Criteria related to date of arrival in the host country.

Desirable (but might not be required by all schemes):

- Record of published research.

(b) Application deadlines: 1 to 2 application deadlines per year.

(c) Recruitment:

- Via open call for applications for fellowships if significant funding available
- Also via:
 - Referrals by potential host institutions
 - Referrals by organisations supporting researchers at risk

(d) Costs: As per track 1 (see page 3 above).

(e) Duration: As per track 1 (see page 3 above).

(f) Evaluation process: It might be expected that a significant proportion of the track 2 applications would come from academics/ researchers who are currently in their first or second placements in Europe organised by either SAR, SRF, Cara, PSI, or PAUSE. Assessment of risk and academic credentials would therefore have been undertaken by one of these organisations in the past, which might accelerate the evaluation process for track 2 candidates. In the preparatory phase mentioned above, it would need to be decided whether a specific number of placements should be reserved for researchers who have recognized refugee status, asylum status, or similar protection status.

(g) Placement & administration: As per track 1.

Related Resources

- [Researchers at Risk: National-level actions in Europe](#): A useful summary of existing national-level initiatives in Europe to support researchers at risk.
- [Inspireurope Recommendations: Expanding opportunities in Europe for researchers at risk](#): Specific recommendations for European, national and institutional level actors on improving support for researchers at risk.
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about researchers at risk.
- [Compendium of resources](#) for researchers at risk and their supporters

Contact Us

To join the Inspireurope+ mailing list and receive quarterly newsletters, sign up [here](#).

If your organisation is interested in establishing a new fellowship scheme for researchers at risk and seek advice from the Inspireurope+ consortium, please contact us at Inspireurope@mu.ie