

Summary Report: Inspireurope+ Leadership Roundtable 2 – Regional

Introduction

As part of the Inspireurope+ project (2022-2025), a series of seminars for leaders of higher education institutions to exchange on strategic approaches for supporting researchers at risk are being held across Europe. The second roundtable with a regional focus took place on 23 October 2023 at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. It gathered 30 institutional representatives from 22 institutions from 12 countries. Their different backgrounds and levels of experience on the subject of institutional and national supports for researchers at risk provided for a fruitful exchange and lively discussions, as well as a vital networking opportunity amongst senior leaders.

The seminar introduced participants to the Inspireurope+ project and began with an opening survey to assess participant knowledge of the project and its aims. Responses to the opening poll showed that before attending this roundtable a large percentage (61%) of the participants were already aware of the the Inspireurope+ project, demonstrating the success of project communication and dissemination work across higher education institutions in Europe to date.

The opening survey also demonstrated that, according to participants, legal obstacles and lack of financial support were the main obstacles to supporting scholars at risk at their institutions. Simultaneously, the participating university leaders identified that the main benefits of hosting researchers at risk were strengthening the international dimensions of their institutional research/teaching programmes, as well deepening and expanding their institution’s talent pool.

Only a few institutions (27%) had benefited from external funds to welcome researchers at risk, and only a small percentage (28%) were currently employing or hosting researchers at risk.

The opening survey was followed by a plenary session and group discussions on the [Inspireurope Recommendations on Expanding Opportunities in Europe for Researchers at Risk](#).

SAR Greece: A Case Study

[SAR Greece](#) was established through the pioneering efforts and administrative support of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and it has proven to be a critical first step in advancing outreach and conversation around support for researchers at risk throughout the Balkans.

SAR Greece demonstrates the importance of national-level organising in pursuing regional synergies throughout Europe to advance coordinated support for researchers at risk. The creation of SAR Greece was based on a realization of the advantages of a horizontal organization at the national level, especially in terms concentrating resources and specialisations to ensure a stronger public presence.

In Greece, efforts to create a national section in support of researchers at risk began in 2018 when Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) became the first Greek university member of the [Scholars at Risk Network](#). AUTH was followed by the Ionian University, the University of the Aegean, and the



University of Thessaly. The [launch of the Scholars at Risk Greece Section](#), with its founding members the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Ionian University, the University of the Aegean, and the University of Thessaly took place on October 1, 2021. Currently SAR Greece consists of seven HEI members, and two aspirant section members. One of the most important lessons learnt during the section formation experience was the need to work closely with the administrations of the universities, as well as the Ministry of Education, in order to strengthen and coordinate various actions to support threatened and persecuted academics regardless of their country or origin.

Another important lesson derived from the experience of establishing SAR Greece was the need to promote the various actions of the section as much as possible, through actively communicating events, publications, and interviews across institutional media channels, as well as national outlets, including television and radio.

One of the most important things that SAR Greece has achieved to date is the signing of an MoU with the Greek Ministry of Migration to enhance visa pathways for at-risk researchers interested in joining Greek HEIs, thus preparing a roadmap to accelerate the [visa process](#) for researchers and their families.

At the same time the SAR Greece steering committee is working with the Ministry of Education and the State Scholarships Foundation to develop a new national initiative. AUTH has developed a dedicated scholarship for a researcher at risk, and will make the first award pending visa approval.

AUTH has also developed a [welcome guide](#) for researchers at risk [in consultation with other national networks](#).

Group Discussion Summary

Participants had the opportunity to exchange their views and interest in building national-level actions, for example Scholars at Risk national sections and other support mechanisms in their own respective countries and discussed what would it take to enable such a process.

The discussion was framed by the following prompts:

- *Discuss the current existing or planned actions of each university regarding researchers at risk;*
- *Discuss interest in building national-level actions, such as a national section to support researchers at risk and specify what would it take to enable such a process.*

- In several countries (Slovakia, Cyprus, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania) it was expressed that the topic of researchers at risk became timely and relevant for university leaders after the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Through language classes, for example, the HEIs in these countries are trying to advance the process of integration. In Cyprus there was already an established community in which Ukrainian researchers were integrated. In Bulgaria they are hosting Ukrainian researchers at risk who were recruited through personal contacts using their own funds. In Albania the government specifically has started to take an interest in this topic since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- In order to strengthen national networks in support of researchers at risk, HEIs need to collaborate more with each other at a national level. In Bulgaria, for example the University of Sofia, active in the SAR network, is trying to inspire other Bulgarian institutions to get involved in activities to support researchers at risk and academic freedom and continues to work toward the establishment of a



national section. The experience from Bulgaria points towards the need of Bulgarian HEIs to speak to each other about this topic in a more regular and systematic way.

- The situation differs greatly amongst Balkan countries regarding the need to address researchers at risk and related issues of academic freedom. Some of these are “transit” countries for researchers at risk who aim to settle in European countries with higher levels of development. These dynamics undermine coordinated efforts to support and host researchers at risk throughout Europe. Additionally, this is compounded by the fact that some countries, for example, Albania, lack funding and a national strategy for how best to support researchers at risk leading to the topic remaining a low priority nationally across HEIs and relevant government ministries.
- It was affirmed that events such as the Inspireurope+ leadership roundtables do help drive and advance national cooperation on supports for researchers at risk in Europe. For example, the three Albanian HEI leaders who attended the roundtable committed to discussing the topic together and continuing the conversations from the roundtable in national leadership circles within Albania, as well as with international colleagues.
- A good suggestion was made to pair up those HEIs and organisations with more experience supporting and hosting researchers at risk with HEIs less experienced with the topic. The University of Strasbourg, for example, demonstrated how they had gained some important knowledge and experience based upon their experience with [PAUSE programme](#) in France.
- It was suggested that appointing or identifying one person from each HEI who would be a responsible and interested contact point for matter of researchers at risk was one way to consolidate and mainstream support conversations within institutions. This did not necessarily need to be an appointment or point of contact at the Vice Rector level, but rather should be an individual empowered and encouraged to work across university structures to expand support for researchers at risk with the express encouragement, and financial and administrative backing, of university leadership.

Summary of Participant Engagement with [Inspireurope Recommendations](#)

Recommendation #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

- The academic community in general shows an interest in this topic, with most higher education institutions including references on academic freedom, inclusion, and diversity in their mission statements and other strategic documents. On some occasions researchers at risk could be mentioned more specifically as part of any provision regarding vulnerable groups based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- The issue of academic freedom was affirmed as a very important one and a strong tradition in many of the participating universities. Academic freedom was affirmed as a human right, as well as often being a constitutional right in many of the national contexts.
- There are already initiatives in some of the universities (Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia) to protect diversity and enhance equity and inclusion, e.g., equality committees, non-discrimination policies, whistleblowing policies and strong hate speech laws. These can be more specifically linked to the resourcing and protection of researchers at risk.



- There were good non-discrimination policies and strong hate speech laws identified in most of the national contexts represented at the leadership roundtable. It was affirmed as being important to continue to link such national legislation and regulation with EU regulations and directives regarding non-discrimination, and to avail of them all with regard to advancing and protecting the rights of researchers at risk across Europe.
- It was acknowledged that in most of the participating universities there was no formal strategy specifically designed for addressing the needs of researchers at risk, and it was recognised that recurrent and structural engagement with this topic within institutions was crucial for regularising hosting and support processes at the institutional level.

Recommendation #8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk

- It was observed that country specific differences regarding visas and an irregular European legal landscape led to different visa outcomes for researchers at risk from country to country, often complicating, delaying, or derailing the institutional supports around obtaining a visa for researchers at risk. Common issues causing the delivery of visas to be delayed included excessive paperwork and the involvement of multiple government ministries or national authorities.
- The participants agreed that across various national contexts the delivery of visas needed to be accelerated in order to increase uptake on hosting offers. This would also make the processes of strengthening the international dimensions of their institutional research/teaching programmes, and expanding their institution's talent pool – net benefits identified in hosting considerations – more efficient.

University of Strasbourg: A Case Study

The University of Strasbourg made a presentation detailing how it had established a new [“solidarity” department](#) within the university which deals with all precarious students and staff, including researchers and students at risk and refugees. The department relies in part on the structural supports enabled by [France's national-level programme for scientists and artists in exile, PAUSE](#).

- Significant support funding for researchers at risk comes from the Government of France, with additional monies provided by private donors.
- The University of Strasbourg works to support researchers at risk on a co-funding model, with the university providing a certain percentage of support funds and the rest coming from the PAUSE programme.
- The researchers at risk arrive on a [“scientific visa” \(passeport talent - chercheur\)](#). Families may also accompany researchers at risk on this visa and are issued multi-year residence permits. Researcher from specific countries need visa approval by the Ministry of the Interior.
- Hosting agreements are supported by [Euraxess](#).

Conclusions

The Second Inspireurope+ Leadership Roundtable was a success due to its regional character. It focused on addressing the needs of host institutions in Eastern and Southern Europe, who have not historically enjoyed the same resources or supports for hosting researchers at risk as institutions in Northern and Western Europe.

The event was successful in both community building and knowledge dissemination and advanced Inspireurope+'s goal to extend coordination and support for researchers at risk amongst HEIs in Eastern and Southern Europe, and specifically the Balkan countries. The participants agreed that the seminar resourced their questions well about expanding institutional opportunities for researchers at risk.

While the participants agreed that measures in support of researchers at risk recommended by the Inspireurope+ project would be effective in their respective HEIs if executed, they also acknowledged the need for additional strategic commitment to researchers at risk within national and institutional budgets. In particular, they underlined the need for more flexible and less bureaucratic procedures when it comes to visas and funding applications, as well as enhanced collaboration with local authorities. Finally, participants highlighted the need to engage more concretely with decision-makers within national governments on support for researchers at risk, and to resource these conversations both through direct contact with researchers at risk, as well as via the institutional structures already available in university international offices and university departments of equality, inclusion, and diversity.



Participants in Inspireurope+ Second Leadership Roundtable, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 23 Oct. 2023

List of Participants in Inspireurope+ Second Leadership Roundtable, 23 October 2023

First name	Last name	Position	Home Institution	Country
Dhimitri	Bello	Rector	"Fan S. Noli" University	Albania
Benita	Stavre	Vice-rector	"Fan S. Noli" University	Albania
Fatbardh	Sallaku	Rector	Agricultural University of Tirana	Albania
Erinda	Lika	Vice Rector	Agricultural University of Tirana	Albania
Besnik	Aliaj	Rector	POLIS University	Albania
Arben	Gjata	Rector	University of Medicine Tirana	Albania
Anila	Paparisto	Vice Rector	University of Tirana	Albania
Enkeleint	Mechili	Vice-Rector	University of Vlora	Albania
Roland	Zisi	Rector	University of Vlora	Albania
Alison	Morrisroe	Policy and Project Manager	European University Association	Belgium
Enita	Nakas	vice-rector	University of Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina
George	Dimosthenous	Rector	Frederick University	Cyprus
Christo+A14:F25s	Papastylianos	School University of Nicosia	Associate Professor of Public Law/Head of	Cyprus
Marie	Déroche	Head of Solidarity Department	University of Strasbourg	France
Joel	Hanisek	Program Manager	SAR Europe/Maynooth University	Ireland
Gojko	Joksimovic	Professor	University of Montenegro	Montenegro
Olga	Koshevaliska	Dean of the Faculty of Law	Goce Delcev University	North Macedonia
Ana	Nikodinovska Krstevska	Vice Rector for international coopreation	Goce Delcev University	North Macedonia
Elena	Maksimova	Assistant professor, Faculty of Law	Goce Delchev University	North Macedonia
Mirjana	Nikolić	Rector	University of Arts in Belgrade	Serbia
Daniel	Santos	Vice Rector for Internationalization	University of Oviedo	Spain
Alberto	Esparza	Program manager	University of Oviedo	Spain
Efthalia	Hatzigianni	Vice Rector for Administrative Affairs, Internat	University of Peloponnesse	Greece
Dimitrios	Koveos	Rector	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Haralambos	Feidas	Vice Rector for Finance, Planning & Development	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Efstratios	Stylianidis	Vice Rector for Research and Lifelong Learning	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Ioanna	Kostarella	Assoc. Professor, Inspireurope+ AUTH member	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Andreas	Takis	Assoc. Professor, Inspireurope+ AUTH member	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Alexandros	Triantafyllidis	Assoc. Professor, Inspireurope+ AUTH academic responsible, Chair of SAR	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Ioanna	Georgiadou	Head of the Department of European Educational Programmes	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Malamati	Tsapoutzoglou	Inspireurope+ AUTH member	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	Greece
Xenofon	Bitsikas	Vice-Rector	University of Ioannina	Greece
L. Kotsonopoulos		Assoc. Prof. -SAR Representative	Panteion University	Greece



LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2-REGIONAL

MONDAY 23.10	
Venue: Faculty of Education (10th floor) 	
09.30	Registration – Welcome Coffee
10.15	Opening-Welcome address by Prof. Dimitrios Koveos, Rector
Moderators: Alexandros Triantafyllidis, Joel Hanisek	
10.30	Researchers at risk in Europe – SAR EUROPE and the Inspireurope (+) projects Dr Joel Hanisek, Program Manager, SAR Europe
10.45	Responding to Refugee Crisis Actions by participating Universities to support Refugee Academics <i>Group discussion:</i> The participants will break into two groups to share their own experiences and report back in plenary. Facilitators: 1 st group: Alexandros Triantafyllidis – Aikaterini Kalliaridou, 2 nd group: Ioanna Kostarella, Andreas Takis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)
11.45	Building SAR Greece – How we got there Presentation by Alexandros Triantafyllidis, Professor of the School of Biology, Inspireurope+ AUTH Scientific Responsible, Chair of SAR Greece Section Q&A from the participants, moderated by Alexandros Triantafyllidis
12.00	Coffee Break
Moderators: Alison Morrisroe, Jesús Daniel Santos Rodríguez	
12.30	Inspireurope Policy recommendations for support of researchers at risk Presentation & lessons learned from EUA's 1st Leadership Roundtable (April 2023) Alison Morrisroe, Policy and Project Manager, European University Association Experience from the 1st Leadership Roundtable Jesús Daniel Santos Rodríguez, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation, University of Oviedo
12.45	How to build national and European approaches to supporting researchers at risk in higher education institutions? <i>Group discussion</i> The participants will break into two groups and discuss selected Inspireurope policy recommendations, focusing on support for researchers at risk in institutions' local and national surroundings and providing advice on how to enhance current national and European approaches. Participants will share their own experiences and ideas and report back in plenary. The following recommendations will be discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. ▪ Facilitate access of researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes. ▪ Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk ▪ Create national support programmes for researchers at risk Each recommendation will be discussed by the groups for approximately 10 minutes, followed by a report back in plenary and plenary discussion. Facilitators: Alison Morrisroe, Alexandros Triantafyllidis, Ioanna Kostarella, Malamati Tsapoutzoglou
13.45	Wrap up-key messages , Alexandros Triantafyllidis
14:00	Lunch (10 th floor terrace)
15.00	Commitment to Hosting Researchers at Risk in French Universities as part of the internationalisation strategy of HEIs; the example of the University of Strasbourg Marie Deroche, International researchers office, Université de Strasbourg
15.15	A researcher's experience , Yulia Labetska, MSCA4Ukraine Fellow, Associate Professor, Head of Greek Philology Department, School of Foreign Languages, Mariupol State University
15.30	Parallel Sessions Focus group on Inspireurope Policy Recommendations, Moderator: Alison Morrisroe, EUA SAR network-how to get involved, Moderator: Joel Hanisek, Program Manager, SAR Europe
Official Dinner	
19.30	Venue: EnfantGâté, Telloglion Foundation of Arts 