

Inspireurope+ policy Paper: Facilitating the Reception of Researchers at Risk through Institutional-State Cooperation

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Inspireurope+ is an EU funded project that works to strengthen and coordinate support in Europe for researchers at risk. 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 are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats. Building on the work undertaken by Inspireurope (launched under MSCA in 2019), Inspireurope+ proceeds from the view that excellence in research depends upon free and open scientific debate and requires a diversity of perspectives and methodologies to flourish. The need to expand support for researchers at risk is urgent, and the value of a coordinated effort across countries and institutions that is dedicated to providing support for researchers at risk has never been clearer.

Summary: The skills and attributes of researchers at risk carry significant research potential for hosting countries in Europe. However, even where temporary employment offers are made at European host institutions, many researchers at risk struggle to obtain visas and work permits within the urgent timeframe required. This paper proposes the formal adoption and wider implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between higher education institutions and the State Authorities responsible for Migration Policy (eg. Ministries, Secretariats, Regional Authorities) as a key mechanism to facilitate the legal entry, residence, employment, and integration of researchers at risk. The implementation of such a mechanism across Europe would allow European higher education institutions to swiftly employ talented third-country researchers, whilst also providing an essential refuge for researchers to continue their important work. Drawing on the existing precedent set by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUPh)—as the Chair of the Scholars at Risk (SAR) Greece Section—this policy recommends replication of this cooperative model to promote academic freedom and human rights-based migration policy in Greece and beyond.

Background: Researchers encounter significant barriers to relocation, particularly in securing legal residence, work permits, and temporary academic employment in host countries.¹ Researchers at risk access European host countries primarily via researcher or scientific visas,

¹See *Inspireurope Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response report* (2020) which documents the main challenges faced by researchers at risk in Europe including, difficulties obtaining a visa or work permit, difficulty finding suitable employment and challenges in transitioning out of temporary fellowships to

while a lesser number avail of international protection pathways. However, lengthy and complex application processes, long waiting times, and institutional and administrative barriers often frustrate researchers' efforts to secure the urgent support required to escape dangerous situations. While Greece, as well as other EU member states, have actively engaged in international academic mobility initiatives, there remains a procedural gap in facilitating legal pathways for at-risk researchers. One of the most pressing challenges in this context is the lack of a streamlined, secure, fast and predictable mechanism for handling residence, work permits, and social security for these researchers, even when temporary academic posts are available in host universities.²

Policy Initiative: Memorandum of Understanding between AUTH and the Greek Ministry of Migration

To address this issue in the Greek context, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in April 2023 between AUTH (as Coordinator of SAR Greece) and the General Secretariat for Migration Policy. This MoU establishes a semi-formal framework of cooperation designed to expedite and simplify procedures related to visa issuance, residence permits, and employment authorization for third-country researchers who:

- Have been officially nominated by a reputable international organization (e.g., Scholars at Risk),
- Have been offered a temporary research or teaching position at a Greek Higher Education Institution (HEI).

Key Provisions of the MoU

1. Institutional Partnership

- Signatories include:
 - a) General Secretariat for Migration Policy, Ministry of Migration and Asylum
 - b) Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, acting as the national coordinator of SAR Greece

sustainable employment. Inspireurope (2020) *Inspireurope Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response report* available at: <https://sareurope.eu/inspireurope/inspireurope-publications-policy/>

² The *Inspireurope Recommendations: Expanding Opportunities in Europe for Researchers at Risk* (2022) recommends the enhancement of visa pathways for researchers at risk in order to facilitate access to employment opportunities in Europe. Inspireurope (2022) *Inspireurope Recommendations: Expanding Opportunities in Europe for Researchers at Risk* available at: <https://sareurope.eu/inspireurope/inspireurope-publications-policy/>

2. Establishment of Communication Structure

- Both parties appoint official contact persons and deputies.
- AUTH submits scholars' requests through an official protocol, accompanied by confirmation letters from the hosting HEI's Rector outlining the scholar's post and contractual status (e.g., research fellowship, work contract, scholarship).

3. Accelerated Processing Mechanism

- The General Secretariat designates a responsible unit to ensure priority processing of applications submitted under this MoU.
- Beneficiaries receive detailed instructions, support with documentation, and guidance tailored to their cases, within the bounds of national legislation.

4. Legal and Procedural Certainty

- The MoU enables researchers at risk to navigate Greek immigration law with institutional support, ensuring timely and lawful entry and employment.

Policy Impact and Broader Relevance

The implementation of this MoU marks a critical advancement in the realization of the right to academic freedom, offering researchers at risk safe, legitimate access to employment and residence in Greece while also serving as a template for similar actions in other countries. Its' adoption and implementation provides:

- Concrete legal protection and mobility channels for researchers at risk.
- A framework that aligns migration policy with humanitarian values, academic freedom and human rights as well as with the EU's goals on researcher mobility.
- A replicable model for other universities and public authorities in Greece and beyond.

Beyond its' benefits for Greece, the MoU can serve as a useful blueprint for other European countries to streamline their visa, residence, and work authorization processes to facilitate the swift commencement of employment by researchers at risk. Moreover, this partnership underscores how universities can act as agents of democratic resilience, extending protection not only through symbolic solidarity but also through practical institutional mechanisms.

Policy Recommendations:

To realize the full potential of the MoU, cooperative action is required at institutional, national and European levels.

In Greece, it is strongly recommended that:

1. Other Greek Universities adopt similar agreements with the Ministry of Migration, using the AUTH-MoU as a template.
2. The SAR Greece Section be further supported in coordinating national-level efforts to institutionalize reception pathways for at-risk researchers.
3. The Greek Ministry of Migration formally endorse and expand this model as a standard policy instrument under its humanitarian and talent-mobility frameworks.
4. The MoU's implementation be monitored and evaluated, with scope for procedural enhancements and broader stakeholder engagement.

Beyond Greece, it is recommended that:

1. Universities and public authorities across Europe adopt similar agreements with national ministries responsible for migration policy using the AUTH-MoU as a template. As well as giving practical effect to institutional commitments to academic freedom, the adoption of such an MoU would enable universities and public authorities to swiftly welcome and integrate international research talent into their campuses.
2. As a pioneer of this approach, the Greek Ministry of Migration and SAR Greece should share the agreement with relevant national authorities in other European member states as a positive example of an effective and efficient complementary legal pathway for researchers at risk. Greek national authorities in conjunction with SAR Greece should work with relevant ministries in other European countries to implement a similar arrangement and share learnings from the implementation of the AUTH-MOU.
3. The European Commission consider adopting an EU-wide fast-track visa, residence and work permit authorization process, specifically for researchers at risk modelled on the Greek example. Such a mechanism could be incorporated into existing visa frameworks, ensuring a legally binding and harmonized approach across member states.

4. Conclusion

The AUTH-General Secretariat MoU represents a practical, scalable, and rights-based policy innovation. Its adoption by additional institutions in Greece and beyond will strengthen the European framework for academic freedom and human rights while ensuring essential academic sanctuaries for researchers at risk — a goal aligned with both European values and global academic freedom principles.

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