

Inspireurope+
Recommendations:
**Expanding
opportunities
in Europe for
researchers at risk**
Update 2025

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01.

Introduction:

**Supporting researchers
at risk in Europe**

The background of the lower half of the page features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue. A large, light blue curved shape dominates the bottom left, while a darker blue triangular shape is positioned on the right. These shapes overlap to create a modern, minimalist design.

Why this is needed

Academic freedom is in decline globally, and scholars around the world are facing threats to their lives, liberty, and research careers. According to the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), over half of the world's population live in environments where academic freedom is either severely or completely restricted. The annual [Free to Think](#) report published by Scholars at Risk documents 391 attacks on scholars across 51 countries in 2024 alone. This is evidence of a worrying trend spanning Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, which includes armed conflict, violent crackdowns on dissents both on and off campus, as well as illiberal policies that limit the right to freedom of expression. These concerning trends affect the lives and careers of individual researchers and endanger academic freedom worldwide. When researchers are at risk, not only are individual lives and careers in jeopardy, but the quality and very future of research is also at stake.

More researchers than ever are being forced to leave their countries against this backdrop of violent attacks, wrongful prosecutions, legislative and administrative actions restricting academic freedom, and other severe pressures. Protection programmes can support these researchers to regain the intellectual space they need to continue their work. Therefore, Europe's engagement is of utmost importance.

By supporting researchers at risk, Europe can nurture international research talent, and contributes to global knowledge sharing, diversity of thought,

and innovation. Support for researchers at risk is a concrete way for European countries to demonstrate their commitment to academic freedom, diversity, democracy, human rights, and inclusion. Existing support measures for at-risk researchers showcase tangible benefits for host countries and universities, increasing their capacity to lead on various forms of social, political, cultural, and economic development.

In recent years, the situation of researchers at risk has garnered more attention from policy makers, higher education institutions, civil society organisations and the general public. Existing support mechanisms have been enhanced and new ones developed. However, continuously growing numbers of researchers require assistance, and existing support measures have a limited capacity. There is now an urgent need not only to expand support programmes, but also to enhance systemic and collaborative efforts at both national and European levels.

Such endeavours fully align with ongoing initiatives to strengthen policies and actions in defence of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and, more broadly, higher education and democratic values, that over the past years have received growing attention by European policy makers and the higher education community in Europe. Increasingly, this attention has also included affirmation of the importance of solidarity with researchers at risk, and of the clear link between human rights and the advancement of academic freedom.

How can it be done

Since 2019, the Initiative to Support, Promote and Integrate Researchers at Risk in Europe, in two project rounds (Inspireurope and Inspireurope+), has documented and analysed existing initiatives to support researchers at risk in Europe, and helped to establish new ones. It has also facilitated exchange of experience and training for organisations and higher education institutions, and other measures that have promoted community-building and enhanced cooperation and coordination across the sector. The initiative was developed in close dialogue with researchers at risk higher education institutions, organisations supporting researchers, national governments and the European Union.

The Recommendations listed below are one of the outcomes of the joint work undertaken. First published in 2022, they have been updated in 2025 to reflect the changing political contexts and the progress made to enhance the situation of researchers at risk in Europe.

The Recommendations have been of great value to the consortium members, policy makers, host institutions and a wider range of initiatives across Europe, in particular considering the rise in the number of researchers at risk and the growing engagement and strategic attention to the topic at higher education institutions and research organisations. One concrete example of the impact they have had is Recommendation 2, which has been key to helping Inspireurope+ make Europe's engagement more pertinent and visible. It calls for the establishment of a European programme for supporting researchers at risk, based on detailed [suggestions](#) on how this could function. This recommendation has provided the inspiration and operational basis for the European Commission to establish the [MSCA4Ukraine](#) fellowship programme for researchers displaced due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This was followed by a call by the European Parliament to establish a fellowship

programme open to researchers from around the world, which is currently being piloted under the [SAFE programme](#).

The Recommendations address governments and administrations at both national and EU level, higher education institutions, and research organisations. For each of the recommendations, the annex provides a compendium of resources and Inspireurope(+) materials, further details, examples of best practice, and links to relevant policy documents.

The Inspireurope+ project consortium hopes that the Recommendations will continue to enhance the opportunities available to researchers at risk in Europe by stimulating exchange, cooperation, and capacity at all levels.

- 1. Acknowledge and support researchers at risk in higher education and research – as a matter of defending academic freedom, contributing to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and strengthening international talent pools**
- 2. Establish a permanent European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk**
- 3. Create national support programmes for researchers at risk**
- 4. Facilitate access for researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes**
- 5. Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk**
- 6. Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk**
- 7. Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk**
- 8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk**

02.

Inspireurope+ Recommendations



1. Acknowledge and support researchers at risk in higher education and research – as a matter of defending academic freedom, contributing to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and strengthening international talent pools

In line with their commitment to European and international statements and agendas, the European Commission and the member states are encouraged to develop and maintain systematic and well-coordinated approaches to support researchers at risk, in synergy with existing policies and actions in various areas ranging from education to foreign policy.

This would demonstrate Europe's genuine commitment to academic freedom and to related values such as diversity, equity and inclusion. It would also acknowledge and bolster the efforts made by higher education institutions, in line with the Magna Charta Universitatum, to cherish and defend university values, to host and support researchers at risk, and to engage in academic solidarity.

Key European policy documents and programmes¹ have consistently, and with growing emphasis, pointed to the importance of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and diversity and inclusion as core values of higher education and research, and of democratic society at large. Most recently, the 2025 [Choose Europe](#) initiative proclaims Europe as the “home of [...] scientific freedom”² and aims to attract international talent whose academic freedom is at risk. This emphasises the need to cherish, protect, and defend these rights and values in Europe, as well as in international exchange and cooperation, and to show solidarity with researchers at risk as a cornerstone of this agenda.

Inspireurope+ welcomes the continued policy attention on academic freedom and related issues, and the links to enhancing Europe's international talent pool. At the same time, policy-level statements need to be operationalised and implemented through practical measures supporting researchers at risk.

European and national policy levels

Support for researchers at risk should be included in European and national-level policies, leading to strategic actions that proactively protect and promote academic freedom and university autonomy at national level and through international exchange and cooperation. It must be embedded within the wider context of policies and actions on democracy, and human and civil rights. In turn, this will help to raise broad awareness, build synergies, and develop advocacy networks across a wider range of actors.

Beyond their moral duty to support researchers at risk and any concerns over values and human rights, European governments should acknowledge the valuable contributions that researchers at risk bring

¹ Including:

- the 2024 [Tirana Communiqué](#) of the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- the European Union's [Global Approach to Research and Innovation](#), its [2022 Communication on a European Strategy for Universities](#), and [Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation](#);
- the 2020 [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#);
- the 2020 ERA for Research and Innovation Communication;
- the 2020 [Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#);
- the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum and its [updated 2020 version](#), which are signed and cherished by universities, but also acknowledged and frequently referenced by governments in European-level policy documents and in the development of national higher education frameworks.

² [Closing speech](#) by President von der Leyen at the 'Choose Europe for Science' event at La Sorbonne, 5 May 2025 (p. 2).

to the European and national talent pools, and to academic and research communities, labour markets, and societies.

As part of the Team Europe approach, the EU and its member states should further coordinate and cooperate with international partners to promote academic freedom in Europe and around the world.

This will boost awareness of academic freedom at international levels and enable and strengthen targeted transnational responses to attacks on higher education communities.

Such an approach also aligns with existing efforts to create evidence-based policies and practices such as the [Academic Freedom Index](#) and the planned monitoring framework for higher education values in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Within the European Commission, the establishment of a single contact point for issues concerning academic freedom and researchers at risk would encourage closer collaboration between hitherto separate initiatives and funds from different Directorates General (Research and Innovation; Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; Migration and Home Affairs; Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations; International Partnerships, Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf) and their respective executive agencies. Furthermore, a European expert group on both students and researchers at risk could be set up to facilitate a policy dialogue between EU institutions, member states and stakeholder organisations and to coordinate the design and implementation of possible European funding and support instruments.

All these efforts will lead to more efficient schemes to support researchers at risk, and better protection of university values and human rights, strengthen Europe's higher education and research sectors and the quality of their international cooperation, and broadly contribute to Europe's social resilience.

Higher education institutions

Academic freedom and solidarity among academics are uncontested values of the higher education community. They are stated in the Magna Charta Universitatum and are frequently referenced by universities, university associations, and networks. Even though they are considered core elements of university culture, they must not be taken for granted.

Protection of academic freedom and solidarity with fellow academics should be clearly referenced in universities' mission and value statements and in

their strategies and actions, including in the areas of internationalisation and global outreach, and equity, inclusion and diversity, which are already established in most European higher education institutions. All references should also acknowledge the contribution that researchers at risk make as international scholars to the institution and its research, education, and third missions.

Universities should ensure that academic freedom and solidarity with fellow academics are understood and promoted by all members of the institution, and clearly articulated in their external cooperation with national and international partners across academia, society and industry.

Universities' ability to act on these core values should be strengthened through concrete measures, including support for researchers at risk. Furthermore, universities should share their experience in this regard through peer learning and training activities as well as public outreach.

2. Establish a permanent European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk

The European Union should prioritise academic freedom and support for researchers at risk under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)³. It should establish a permanent European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk, based on established good practices of existing national and international programmes, including MSCA4Ukraine and SAFE. This would also inform and encourage the development of similar initiatives at EU member state level and inspire and coordinate exchange and collaboration. Such an instrument is needed on a permanent basis and could be enhanced in times of crisis. Universities should showcase their support for researchers at risk by advocating the establishment of a permanent European initiative.

The Inspireurope(+) projects have shown the urgent need for dedicated and sufficiently flexible funding instruments for researchers at risk and for the institutions and organisations that support them. Both projects have provided clear evidence of the feasibility, positive impact, and added value of European fellowship programmes and European-level coordinated support for at-risk researchers.

Requests for assistance from at-risk researchers far exceed available funding for placements and positions

through existing organisations and initiatives in Europe. There are few national-level funding schemes for researchers at risk, with limited capacities. European support is currently offered solely on a project and pilot basis via MSCA4Ukraine and SAFE. These schemes have proven that such initiatives are entirely feasible and have a strong impact in host countries and institutions, well beyond fellowships for individual researchers. A permanent European initiative would increase the opportunities for researchers at risk and strengthen academic freedom, not only through the fellowships themselves but also by setting a clear example for other initiatives.

European and national policy levels

The establishment of a permanent European fellowship scheme in the next MFF (2028-34) would demonstrate Europe's genuine commitment to academic freedom and spark knock-on effects at the level of member states and international partner countries.

A European fellowship scheme should comprise three distinct tracks:

- A first track should offer placements for researchers at risk who are outside the refugee process, still in their home country, and facing an emergency situation;
- A second track should target researchers at risk who have already left their home country; it should also include initial placements for refugee researchers and follow-up funding for at-risk researchers who are

³ See also: [Call to Europe to champion academic freedom and protect academics at risk](#), issued by the Inspireurope+, MSCA4Ukraine and SAFE consortia.

outside the refugee process in order to extend their initial placement period.

Both fellowship tracks should include direct support for researchers at risk, as well as funding for measures fostering their inclusion within the host institution and host country. Placements should be provided for up to two years, with a possible extension for an additional year.

- A third track should provide funding for the creation of a long-term support network, such as a European coordination structure that brings together key actors to promote academic freedom and protect at-risk researchers, enabling them to join forces, peer-learn and share best practices.

Funding for a European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk should make use of synergies between different European programmes and instruments, including Horizon Europe, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and the European Social Fund, and their respective successors in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF).

Furthermore, a permanent European fellowship programme should provide a means to enable exchange and collaboration between national and international support programmes for researchers at risk, which would have a positive impact on quality, efficiency and visibility. This would also help to ensure swift, concerted action in times of emergency.

Inspireurope+ has developed concrete operational suggestions on how such an initiative can be implemented.

Higher education institutions

European universities, individually and collectively through university associations and networks, can play an important role in raising awareness of academic freedom. Universities can advocate to national authorities and call for the establishment of a European fellowship scheme. Those that have already welcomed fellows through one of the national or European pilot schemes can showcase the positive impact of hosting on research output and internationalisation at home, and on the promotion of academic freedom and university values more generally.

3. Create national support programmes for researchers at risk

National-level programmes should be set up in addition to a European scheme. Lessons should be drawn from existing and newly emerging national initiatives. Higher education institutions can play a crucial role in establishing national-level support for researchers at risk.

By creating national-level programmes for researchers at risk, public authorities have a powerful opportunity to show their commitment to academic freedom, democracy, and civil values, and more broadly to diversity and inclusion in research and higher education. Highly visible programmes are likely to inspire other initiatives nationally, across Europe and globally.

National policy levels

Existing national support programmes in Europe for researchers at risk provide life-saving support to many scholars. These schemes provide excellent models and should be replicated across the EHEA. Drawing on the experience of established national fellowship programmes for researchers at risk, these schemes can be established in various formats:

- government-backed support programmes that provide dedicated fellowships and other direct support for researchers at risk;
- partnerships between national education or development agencies and organisations dedicated to supporting researchers at risk;
- partnerships with NGOs and international networks.

Inspireurope+ partners are ready to advise and assist ministries, national agencies and higher education institutions and other stakeholders interested in establishing national support schemes, even after the project's completion.

More generally, national authorities should ensure that universities are able to host, support, and hire researchers at risk from third countries, by providing appropriate framework conditions. This includes eliminating legal and regulatory obstacles; ensuring budgetary flexibility; and harmonising human resources forms and processes to include at-risk researchers.

Higher education institutions

Universities can play a key role in establishing and developing national support programmes: they can showcase their commitment to supporting researchers at risk and inform policy makers about the opportunities and benefits that come from welcoming international talent. In collaboration with other institutions and NGOs, higher education institutions themselves may also establish national networks and structures.

Universities should also alert national authorities to any shortcomings in framework conditions and legislation that may hinder the hosting of researchers at risk, and propose adequate solutions.

4. Facilitate access for researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes

The rules and conditions for existing EU funding programmes for research and education should be adapted to accommodate the specific situation of researchers at risk. Both national agencies and universities should inform researchers at risk about these opportunities.

European programmes such as MSCA and European Research Council (ERC) fellowship programmes are not well known among researchers at risk. More importantly, they are difficult to access due to eligibility criteria, application procedures, and evaluation criteria. Researchers at risk would be able to participate in greater numbers if some adjustments were made to existing schemes. While these programmes currently do not lend themselves to providing the emergency support required by many researchers at risk, they may provide good career development opportunities to researchers who are no longer at immediate risk.

European policy level

Researchers at risk should be given broader access to existing fellowship programmes, particularly the MSCA, through the measures set out below.

- There should be clearer communication on European and national programmes and their opportunities for researchers at risk: researchers at risk should be explicitly mentioned and encouraged to apply in calls for applications. European programmes should make use of national and international initiatives and networks supporting researchers at risk, including Inspireurope, to ensure broad dissemination of their calls.

- Eligibility criteria should be adjusted; for example, the more flexible mobility rule that MSCA currently applies to applicants in the refugee process should be extended to those in an at-risk situation.
- Application procedures should be made more flexible: a second annual intake of applications would reduce waiting periods for researchers at risk. The joint nature of applications should be waived so that researchers could apply as individuals first, and approach potential host institutions once their MSCA application has been successful, pending an offer from a host institution. A dedicated category should be created in the application forms, allowing applicants to identify as a researcher at risk.
- Evaluation criteria should be adjusted: greater openness in the evaluation process to non-linear career tracks would enhance the application prospects for researchers at risk. Evaluators and selection committees should receive training on the situation of researchers at risk. If possible, funding should be earmarked for a number of researchers at risk, potentially deploying funds from initiatives with different European funding programmes and instruments.

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions should implement the MSCA Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk when recruiting researchers, and provide accompanying measures, such as career guidance and training, including information about EU and national fellowship and research programmes.

5. Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk

Beyond emergency support, all policies, support structures and funding instruments at European, national and institutional level should aim to boost the social and professional mobility of researchers at risk. This would bring benefits to the researchers and their countries of residence and increase the impact and sustainability of measures.

Following their initial placement, many researchers at risk would benefit from consecutive arrangements, ideally employment or another grant, which would also enhance their personal and professional standing in their host countries. This is a major precondition for their success, well-being, and sustained social mobility. Any arrangement should also include assistance and support for their families.

European and national policy levels

European and national programmes should support the personal and professional integration of researchers at risk and their families into host environments through dedicated funding. Targeted support and integration measures should be included in grant programmes, enabling hosts to offer tailored support to improve the long-term career prospects of researchers at risk.

European and national support programmes could also directly offer capacity building, information and materials, and peer learning for current and future host institutions. National-level migrant integration programmes could either include researchers at risk directly or serve as a model for related programmes specific to at-risk researchers.

When designing support measures for the professional integration and inclusion of researchers at risk, governments should collaborate with a wider range of relevant stakeholders, particularly host institutions, employment agencies and employer networks, municipalities, and NGOs.

Higher education institutions

Universities should consider researchers' integration needs and post-placement plans beyond the initial placement period. This can be done by:

- designating both an academic and an administrative mentor and ensuring that they are adequately trained and supported;
- providing the researchers with guidance and information on academic and research cultures and programmes;
- considering their family situation, providing advice and support for professional and social integration, e.g. employment of spouses, education for children, etc.;
- offering access to language training to meet professional requirements but also to promote social integration (local language);
- providing career guidance for researchers at risk and their partners, including information on employment procedures and visa requirements, schooling, and childcare support;
- encouraging networking with fellow researchers to foster shared learning and collaboration, for example through joint research proposals;
- adapting and supplementing existing measures to welcome and include international researchers (where they exist) with support specifically tailored to the needs of at-risk researchers.

Host institutions should make use of the information and advice provided by national and international initiatives on how to host a researcher, how to support their professional integration and inclusion, and how to prepare them for a transition into further employment. Exchanges among institutions could further mutual learning and sharing of resources.

6. Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk

European, national, and institutional support measures and initiatives should enable researchers at risk to explore the wider labour market outside of higher education institutions, helping them to take advantage of the thus far underused opportunities available in the private sector and industry.

Researchers at risk provide a diverse pool of international talent. Their qualifications and skills are of high value and interest to a wide range of public and private employers, beyond the higher education and research institutions that are often their entry point into Europe. Employing and supporting researchers at risk can link to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and diversity and inclusion programmes that many private companies have in place.

European and national policy levels

European and national policies should aim to raise awareness in the private sector of the benefits and opportunities of hiring international talent with an at-risk background, and provide concrete, practical information on visa requirements and procedures, for instance via national employment services. At-risk researchers would benefit from a dedicated service track in EURES (European cooperation network of employment services), matchmaking them with European employers.

European and national policy makers should encourage existing programmes for refugee integration to extend to researchers at risk. Although most researchers at risk enter Europe via labour pathways (rather than international protection), existing national and European initiatives assisting refugees could be expanded to include opportunities for researchers at risk. Such initiatives could match researchers at risk with companies, and provide information and training on European (research) employment markets, CV drafting support, skills training, and mentoring. Existing initiatives in the field of EURAXESS and its Science for Refugees should be expanded.

European and national policies and programmes should incentivise employers to take concrete measures, as

outlined below, to expand employment opportunities for researchers at risk.

Employment outside of universities and research institutes

For employers in the public and private sector there is much to gain from engaging with the diverse talent pool of highly skilled at-risk researchers. Companies, NGOs, local authorities and other employers should consider the following measures:

- Include researchers at risk in recruitment strategies by partnering with organisations that support researchers at risk to extend the reach of their recruitment processes. Such partnerships could be realised within the framework CSR programmes to maintain talent pipelines and market competitiveness.
- Offer skills training and mentoring: companies, local authorities, and other employers should provide skills training and mentoring to support researchers' transition from academia into other sectors.
- Offer dedicated placements, as higher education institutions around the world have done in recent decades. Employers should create similar hosting schemes for researchers at risk.

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions already hosting researchers at risk can assist them with the transition to other sectors by providing information and advice, as part of their institution's existing career services, or by referring researchers to specialised services for further support.

Institutions could also offer opportunities for researchers to engage in university-business partnerships. This could help to expand opportunities outside of academia for researchers at risk by making their skills more transferable and supporting networking with private sector representatives.

In the context of a precarious academic labour market, host institutions also have a role to play in ensuring researchers at risk are fully aware of the challenging work environment and employment frameworks for researchers in general. This may include providing clear information about the shortage of tenured positions, the proliferation of short-term contracts, the sector's expectations regarding high levels of researcher mobility, and the high percentage of PhD graduates who work outside of academia. This will allow researchers at risk to make fully informed decisions about whether to focus on remaining in academia or invest more effort in career opportunities in other sectors.

7. Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk

Researchers at risk in Europe may face a number of disadvantages when entering the European labour market in addition to their at-risk situation: their ethnic and migration background, legal issues related to visa or protection status, non-western education and employment record, career breaks due to their at-risk situation – and especially for women researchers – family responsibilities and a gender gap at the postgraduate level in regions of origin.

Policies addressing at-risk researchers through the lens of intersectionality should encourage a multifaceted perspective that combines single axis categories such as nationality, gender, ethnicity, and class.

European and national policy levels

National and European support programmes for researchers at risk should address the intersectional challenges faced by their applicants. They should acknowledge the structural interconnectedness of risks with various forms of oppression that may also be experienced in host contexts, such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, language discrimination, and discrimination based on religion or belief. Intersectionality needs to be considered in the selection procedures for fellowships as well as in follow-on support mechanisms. This means taking into account the specific situation of each applicant, including applicants with non-traditional career pathways, in addition to their at-risk background. Special efforts

should also be made to address “intersectional invisibility” as it affects at-risk researchers, including gender minority candidates.

In addition to direct funding for placements, programmes should also include or offer cost coverage for support such as childcare, post-trauma therapy/treatment, and dedicated guidance such as career re-entry schemes and peer support groups.

European and national-level intersectional approaches to at-risk researchers should also encourage more cross references between category-specific action plans, leading to better policy coherence and greater administrative awareness of complementary or parallel programmes.

Higher education institutions

Some dimensions of intersectionality are often already addressed in institutions’ equity/equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies. However, a concrete link to researchers at risk needs to be established in institutional strategic documents, activities, and structures with a focus on intersectionality.

Internal selection and appointment committees should receive training on intersectionality to avoid biases against researchers at risk, and to ensure successful and inclusive placements that recognise that there may not be a one-size-fits-all approach.

8. Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk

Researchers at risk enter Europe primarily on researcher or scientific visas, but in some cases through international protection pathways. European and national authorities should expedite visa applications and expand complementary pathways to protection in order to facilitate access for researchers at risk to employment opportunities in Europe.

While some researchers at risk have recognised refugee or other protection status, most are outside the refugee process, seeking or holding temporary visas and work permits through visiting researcher positions at host institutions in Europe or elsewhere. The use of complementary pathways for researchers at risk needs to be scaled up, and European governments should act on the commitments they have already made.

European and national policy levels

All EU member states should fully implement the Students and Researchers Directive (2016/801), which sets out the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of research. The directive facilitates access to Europe for researchers at risk and their families, particularly with regard to enhanced mobility within the EU, family reunification rights, and maximum processing times for visa applications. Current differences in how EU member states transpose the directive into national legislation should be minimised.

In addition to respecting the maximum processing times set out in the Students and Researchers Directive, the processing of researcher visas should be further expedited for researchers at risk and their families, when they demonstrate proof of an existing host

institution, job, or sponsor. Host institutions should also be able to submit supporting documentation (hosting agreement, employment contract, etc.) on the researcher's behalf and with the researcher's permission.

Peer-learning between government officials and visa authorities should be facilitated and encouraged to improve practices. Relevant ministries in EU member states (Education, Research, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Home Affairs, Justice) should systematically cooperate with national or international support organisations for researchers at risk to ensure broad awareness and smooth functioning of visa procedures for researchers and scholars using a complementary legal pathway. Such arrangements can be diverse, as countries' varied responses to the emergency situation in Afghanistan and Ukraine illustrate.

In situations where very significant numbers of scholars are facing severe, immediate risks, such as in Gaza and Afghanistan, a variety of pathways to safety (in addition to the usual researcher visa pathway) need to be deployed. In severe situations, European governments should waive any intent-to-return and home residency requirements that may apply to visa applications for at-risk scholars and researchers for the foreseeable future.

The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), first implemented in March 2022 in the context of the war in Ukraine, is a welcome measure that greatly eases access for researchers from Ukraine to safety, residency, and employment in European academic and non-academic sectors. National authorities should undertake concrete measures to keep Ukrainian scholars in higher education and research during a period of enforced exile. Consideration also needs to be given to the situation facing non-Ukrainian scholars who were resident in Ukraine in February 2022 but fall outside the scope of the TPD, and to the question of their safe return.

Higher education institutions and other employers

To ensure the timely processing by visa authorities of research or scientific visas for researchers at risk, higher education institutions and other employers should expedite internal processes to provide the necessary supporting documentation to invited researchers, including job offers, hosting agreements and any other required documents.

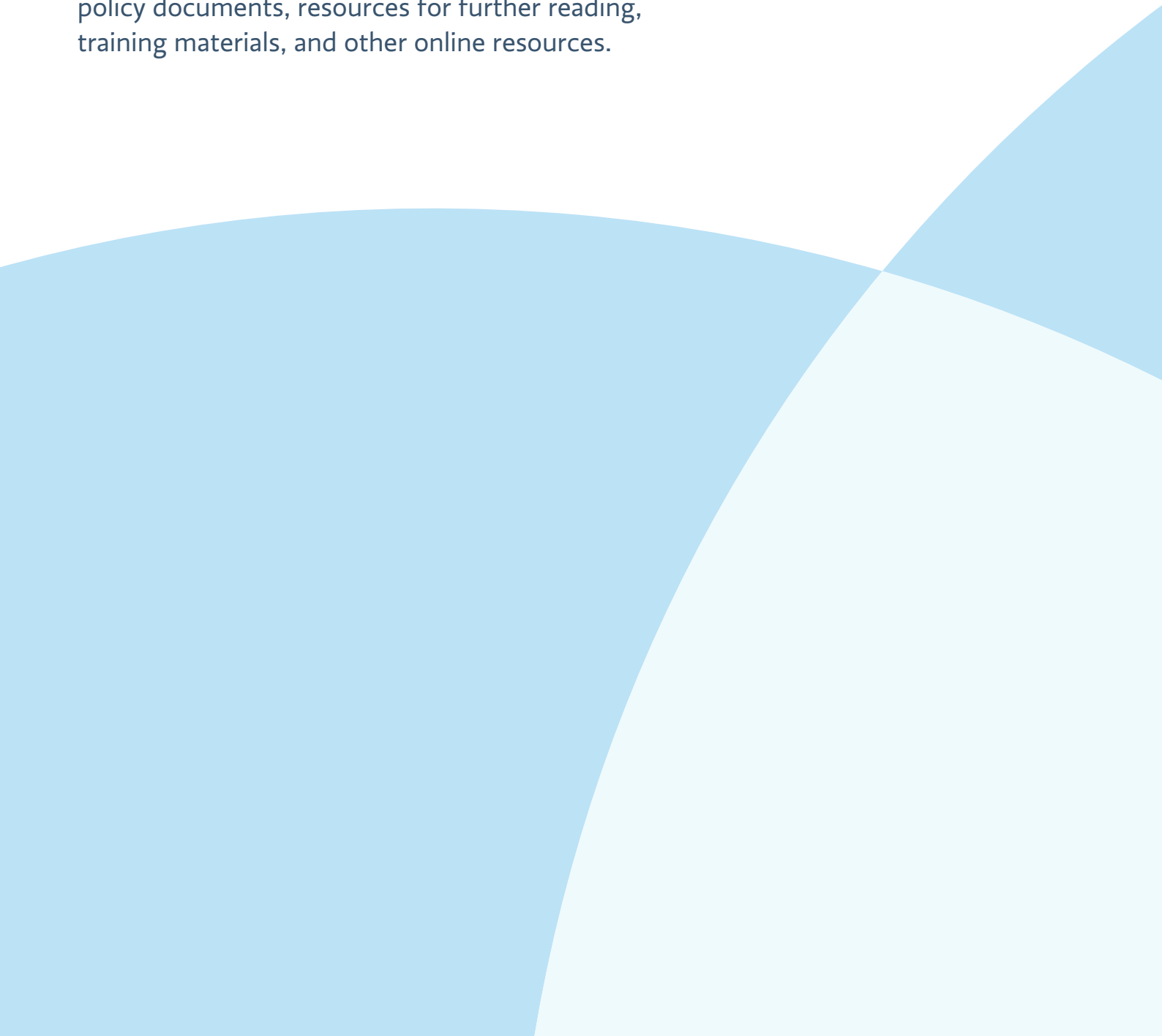
It would be beneficial for representatives from human resources, international offices, and other departments with experience in hosting international scholars to share their expertise with other institutions in their countries with regard to facilitating visa processes for researchers at risk.

03.

Annex:

Further information and resources

The following provides a range of definitions, examples and background information for each of the policy recommendations, including links to policy documents, resources for further reading, training materials, and other online resources.



Background

Who are researchers at risk?

Researchers at risk include researchers, scholars, and scientists at all stages of their research careers, from doctoral candidates to experienced researchers and professors, who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or research career, and those who are displaced because of such threats.

While some researchers at risk have recognised refugee, asylum, or similar protection status, a more significant proportion of those seeking the assistance of NGOs specialising in the field of scholar protection are outside the refugee process, seeking or holding temporary visas or work permits through visiting research/scholar positions at host universities in Europe or elsewhere, outside their home countries.

Why are researchers at risk?

The global Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) reports that although each individual researcher's situation is unique, clear patterns have emerged within the nearly 10,000 applications for assistance SAR has received since its founding in 2000. The kinds of risk identified by SAR are detailed below.

- Risk due to the content of a scholar's work, research, or teaching being perceived as threatening by authorities or other groups. When the development of ideas, exchange of information, and expression of new opinions are considered threatening, individual scholars/researchers are particularly vulnerable.
- Risk because of the individual's status as academics/researchers. Given their education, frequent travel, and professional standing, scholars are often prominent members of their community. Where a scholar is a member of a political, ethnic, or religious minority, a woman, or a member of LGBTQ+ communities, an attack on an individual scholar may be a highly visible and efficient means for intimidating and silencing others.
- Risk as a result of their peaceful exercise of basic human rights, in particular, the right to freedom of expression or freedom of association.
- Risk as a result of conflict, situational violence, and natural disasters.

Who threatens researchers?

Researchers report threats from a range of state and non-state actors. These may include armed groups in conflict, armed militant, paramilitary, and extremist groups, police and military forces, government authorities, and members of the researchers' own higher education communities. Further distinction may be made between: (a) any of the above actors that threaten everyone within a particular society, including researchers and scholars; (b) actors that target researchers and scholars specifically; and (c) actors that target individual researchers/scholars.

Why is further support needed for researchers at risk in Europe?

The Inspireurope report [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response](#) shows that there is excellent work already underway in Europe in support of researchers at risk. A number of NGOs and support organisations partner with higher education institutions across Europe to arrange temporary positions for researchers at risk to enable them to continue their work safely. However, as shown in the report, annual applications for assistance from at-risk scholars and researchers far exceed available funding for positions. Every year, there are many more qualified candidates seeking positions through these organisations than there is funding to provide.

Although a number of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020-funded projects provide very valuable support to institutions and organisations supporting researchers at risk, there is currently no dedicated European-level fellowship mechanism for researchers at risk. As outlined below, the MSCA and ERC fellowship programmes in their current formats are not accessible to most researchers at risk. EU-funded support for human rights defenders has supported a limited number of researchers at risk, primarily through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) emergency grants and ProtectDefenders.eu. However, there has not been a widespread use of these options, primarily due to their eligibility criteria and the relatively modest scale and amount of the grants (approximately €10,000 per candidate).

Through studies and consultations, Inspireurope has explored the situation of researchers at risk in Europe, finding that many researchers at risk are also supported by international fellow academics and their universities. European universities are one of their main destinations. Fellowships and placements help researchers and their families, but they also benefit their host institutions, the research communities, and societies and economies at large.

For Europe, supporting researchers at risk is also a matter of demonstrating and defending its values such as academic freedom, diversity and inclusion, and protecting and promoting democracy, both within Europe and in global exchanges. These issues are receiving growing recognition in European and national policy documents, but require swift and systematic action. It is clear that Europe must do more, as conditions for researchers are worsening in many countries.

By strengthening its support for researchers at risk, Europe can show its commitment to core values such as academic freedom. In addition, international talent will contribute to European societies and economies.

Recommendations

🔗 Recommendation 1 Acknowledge and support researchers at risk in higher education and research as a matter of defending academic freedom, contributing to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and strengthening international talent pools

What is academic freedom, and how does it link to researchers at risk?

Academic freedom is defined as “the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.” ([UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-education Teaching Personnel](#), p. 57 (1997)).

“Freedom of scientific research is related to freedom of expression, freedom of association, the freedom of movement and the right to education, among other rights. It encompasses the right to freely define research questions, choose and develop theories, gather empirical material and employ sound academic research methods, to question accepted wisdom and bring forward new ideas. It entails the right to share, disseminate and publish the results thereof openly, including through training and teaching. It is the freedom of researchers to express their opinion without being disadvantaged by the system in which they work or by governmental or institutional censorship and discrimination. It is also the freedom to associate in professional or representative academic bodies. Freedom of scientific research needs opportunities for physical and virtual mobility in pursuit of one’s research work, requires a culture of gender equality and the freedom to interact with students and colleagues. Freedom of scientific research is informed by the standards of academic disciplines. At the same time, it enables researchers to challenge these standards when and if new research results begin to question their current validity. Any limitation on the freedom of scientific research must be still compatible with the nature of this right and be determined through regular procedures of the rule of law. Scholars’ exercise of rights derived from the freedom of scientific research must

take into account the rights of others.” ([Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#), p. 2 (2020))

A more detailed definition and reflection on academic freedom can be found in the [Annex I to the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#) of the EHEA.

The free online course “[Dangerous Questions: Why Academic Freedom Matters](#)” explains why defending academic freedom is important, not only for academics but for all of society. The course explains how academic freedom relates to other higher education and societal values, and the threats or challenges to these values that arise in different contexts. It offers practical suggestions as to how people, including students and academics, can promote and defend academic freedom and related values. The course was developed by Scholars at Risk and the University of Oslo as part of the EU-funded Academic Refuge Project.

How are academic freedom and the support for researchers at risk reflected in European policy documents?

Freedom of research and academic freedom are essential preconditions to world-class research. This is recognised in a number of recent policy documents:

In her May 2025 [speech](#) introducing the [Choose Europe initiative](#), European Commission President von der Leyen states that “Europe must remain the home of academic and scientific freedom,” calling to “enshrine freedom of scientific research into law in a [forthcoming] European Research Area Act.” In recognition of the valuable contributions of international talent to the European labour market, and in view of the obstacles for researchers at risk identified by the Inspireurope(+) projects, as well as the above Recommendations, President von der Leyen commits the EU to “[...] make it easier and more attractive to come to Europe for research, [...] better link up researchers with research institutions, [...] [and] speed up the process around entering and staying in Europe.”

In their [2024 Tirana Ministerial Communiqué](#), the ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) underline that “Higher education can only fully develop its missions when its fundamental values are respected. While they are now more threatened than they were a decade or even four years ago, [ministers] reaffirm [their] commitment to protect, promote, and uphold academic freedom, as defined in the [2020] Rome Communiqué.” (p. 2).

The [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#) (2020) underlines that “freedom of scientific research is a universal right and public good. It is a

core principle of the European Union and as such anchored in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. [...] Research and the freedom to conduct research are indispensable prerequisites for our social, cultural, political and economic resilience and progress.” Signatory countries of the declaration promise to “strengthen academic freedom and institutional autonomy coupled with long-term as well as reliable and stable institutional financing as necessary prerequisites for freedom of scientific research.” The Declaration also states: “We are committed to solidarity with researchers around the globe whose right to freedom of scientific research is violated.”

The Strategic forum for international scientific and technological cooperation ([SFIC](#)) [Opinion on the implementation of the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research in International Cooperation in Research and Innovation](#) (2021) underlines that “[...] freedom of scientific research is a universal value and prerequisite for our global problem-solving capacity” (p. 2) and makes suggestions on how to operationalise the goals set out in the Bonn Declaration. It supports the Inspireurope call for a dedicated European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk.

In its 2022 Communication on a [European Strategy for Universities](#), the European Commission underlines that academic freedom is part and parcel of the European way of life that is supported by higher education and research. It acknowledges that the “numbers of scholars and researchers at risk in European neighbourhood are on the rise” and states that in close cooperation with the stakeholders and the member states, it will provide “[s]upport for researchers at risk with guiding principles for universities to facilitate their inclusion” (p. 10). Placing academic freedom at the core of all EU higher education policies, the EC proposes a number of actions to promote and protect academic freedom and support researchers at risk as part of promoting European democratic values.

In the context of the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the members of the Bologna Follow up Group of the EHEA released a [statement](#) calling on all members and consultative members of the EHEA to “offer refuge and provisional work opportunities for academic staff who have to flee Ukraine or who cannot return” (p. 2).

How are academic freedom and attacks on researchers monitored?

On request of the ministers signing the [2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), the Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG) has developed “(...) a framework for the

enhancement of the fundamental values of the EHEA that will foster self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning across national authorities, higher education institutions and organisations, while also making it possible to assess the degree to which these are honoured and implemented in our systems.” (p. 5). In the current round of the EHEA (2024-27), this technical framework is being piloted.

Such efforts, alongside exploration of new tools and systems for monitoring in the European Research Area (ERA), should build on existing monitoring efforts including the [Free to Think report series](#), the annual reports of SAR’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, which analyses attacks on higher education communities around the world, and the GPPI-developed [Academic Freedom Index](#) which monitors key elements in the de facto realisation of academic freedom: (1) freedom to research and teach; (2) freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; (3) institutional autonomy; (4) campus integrity; and (5) freedom of academic and cultural expression.

Where can I find more resources about implementing equity, diversity and inclusion in a university setting?

Inclusiveness has become a strategic question for most higher education institutions across Europe, impacting learning and teaching, and research and institutional cultures. Many institutions hosting researchers at risk do so as part of their diversity and inclusion strategies. The report entitled [Diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions: results from the INVITED project](#) (2019) provides an overview and examples of how universities address this topic in practice.

A commitment to inclusion has also been made at the European policy level. EHEA ministers signing the [2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#) state that “Socially inclusive higher education will remain at the core of the EHEA and will require providing opportunities and support for equitable inclusion of individuals from all parts of society” (p. 5) and adopted the [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#).

SAR’s discussion guide “[Promoting Higher Education Values](#)” is aimed at assisting higher education institution leaders, scholars, staff, and students. It suggests a framework for analysing situations and for constructive dialogue on values. A companion publication, “[Promoting Higher Education Values: Workshop Supplement](#),” includes sample exercises and questions for discussion, for use by individuals or in guided seminars, workshops, and other public and private settings.

Recommendation 2 Establish a permanent European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk

How would a European fellowship programme for researchers at risk work?

In 2022, the Inspireurope [Recommendation for a dedicated EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk](#) proposed a detailed outline of the potential format, organisation and implementation of a European programme in three distinct tracks, including proposals for eligibility criteria; application, selection and recruitment procedures; scale, cost and duration of the support measures, and an outline of stakeholders involved in the implementation. The document also provides further background information on the need for such a scheme.

These Recommendations set the basis for the establishment of the [MSCA4Ukraine](#) scheme and the [SAFE pilot](#) fellowship scheme. Both will issue concrete recommendations for a permanent European programme (MSCA4Ukraine in 2022, SAFE in 2024), based on lessons learnt from the implementation of their projects, and the exchange with hosts and researchers taking part.

A 2025 [Call to Europe to champion academic freedom and protect academics at risk](#), issued by the Inspireurope+, MSCA4Ukraine and SAFE consortia, underlines the urgent need for a permanent European programme, and urges policy makers to prioritise academic freedom and support for researchers at risk under the post-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

Recommendation 3 Create national support programmes for researchers at risk

What are good practice examples of national fellowship programmes and how can they be replicated in other European countries?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to organising a national-level initiative. The Inspireurope report [Researchers at Risk: An Update on National-level Actions in 2024](#) provides examples of national-level initiatives in Europe supporting researchers at risk.

It distinguishes the following approaches for national support programmes that could be adapted in other countries.

- Government-backed programmes, which offer fellowships and other direct support for researchers at risk. Germany and France are the main host countries for researchers and scholars in exile within the EU. Two good examples are the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's [Philip Schwartz Initiative](#), which is mainly supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, and the [PAUSE programme](#), established and funded by the French Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation and other French Ministries.
- Partnerships with national education/development agencies: in Finland, fellowship activities are supported through a partnership between the [Finnish National Education Agency](#) and the international [Scholar Rescue Fund](#); while in Sweden, fellowships are offered by the [Swedish International Development Agency](#) and implemented by the [Scholars at Risk Sweden](#) section.
- Partnerships with NGOs and international networks: in the UK, where activities to support researchers at risk have been led by the Council for At-risk Academics (Cara), as well as in many other European countries, higher education institutions and associations have partnered with the Scholars at Risk Network to form national SAR sections to organise activities in support of researchers at risk.

When creating new national-level programmes, it is vital to consider the impact of cumulative geopolitical crises and a high increase in demand for placements. Crisis response schemes are important and helpful. However, they should not lead to the discontinuation or neglect of country-agnostic, long-term support structures for researchers at risk.

The Inspireurope+ project partners advise national agencies, ministries, higher education institutions and other stakeholders on good practices for developing national support programmes. Contact information available [here](#) ([SAR Europe](#)), [here](#) ([PAUSE](#)), and [here](#) ([Philipp Schwartz-Initiative](#)).

Recommendation 4 Facilitate access for researchers at risk to existing European funding programmes

Why do European funding programmes need to be adapted?

The Inspireurope report [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response](#) highlights the obstacles faced

by researchers at risk when applying to European funding programmes open to all researchers (Chapter 2.4). Programmes such as MSCA, and its Individual Fellowships, and ERC funds are not accessible to most researchers at risk due to their rules and conditions (for instance, mobility rules cannot be met by researchers at risk, or career breaks due to their at-risk situation cannot be considered etc.). Detailed recommendations on adapting eligibility and evaluation criteria, as well as communications and outreach can be found on the Inspireurope website [here](#).

Where can further information be found for researchers at risk wishing to apply to European programmes, and host institutions that wish to support them in this?

Awareness of and participation in European Union programmes could be enhanced by providing more targeted information to researchers at risk, and by offering guidance and support for applications. Guidance for researchers at risk on accessing existing schemes is provided in the Inspireurope [FAQs on EU funded research fellowships for researchers at risk](#) and webinars:

- [How to apply for an EU-funded research fellowship \(2020\)](#)
- [Mobility within Europe for researchers at risk \(2020\)](#)
- [Remote Fellowships for Researchers at Risk \(2022\)](#)
- [Publication Strategies for Researchers at Risk \(2022\)](#)
- [Understanding Research Integrity and Ethics: Webinar for Researchers at Risk \(2023\)](#)
- [Applying for EU funding opportunities as an at-risk researcher \(2025\)](#)

The [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk](#) provide a number of recommendations to institutional beneficiaries of MSCA on how to widen access for researchers at risk.

Recommendation 5 **Build capacity to enhance long-term prospects for researchers at risk**

Inspireurope and other EU (co-)funded projects offer training and guidance materials on how to enhance long-term career prospects for researchers at risk. These include:

- [How to Host \(SAR 2019\)](#)
- [Pathways to practice: Welcoming scholars at risk to](#)

[campus \(Egner & Catoni 2017\)](#)

- [Trainings on Mentoring Refugee Researchers \(BRiDGE project 2018-20\)](#)
- [How to Host Training Curriculum \(Academic Refugee Project 2018\)](#)
- [Livret d'accueil, A l'attention des établissements \(Programme national d'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil PAUSE 2019\)](#)
- [Inspireurope webinars](#)
 - [Welcoming researchers at risk: considerations for new employers and host organisations in Europe \(2020\)](#)
 - [Funding researchers at risk to join the host organisation \(2020\)](#)
 - [Hosting Researchers at Risk: How employers and hosts can help researchers make the most of their stay \(2020\)](#)
 - [Webinar for employers and host organisations: Psychosocial support for researchers at risk \(2021\)](#)
 - [Peer and mentoring approaches to support researchers at risk \(2024\)](#)
 - [Preparing HEIs in Southeastern Europe to support Researchers at Risk \(2025\)](#)

Recommendation 6 **Expand opportunities beyond academia for researchers at risk**

Where can companies, NGOs, and other non-academic sector employers find out more about supporting researchers at risk?

Companies interested in getting involved may contact Inspireurope Project. Inspireurope also aims to increase employment and career development opportunities for researchers at risk beyond universities and research institutions, for instance in the private sectors and industry. The Inspireurope briefing [Opportunities in industry in Europe for researchers at risk](#) and the webinar [Employment opportunities outside of academia for researchers at risk \(2024\)](#) provide an overview of opportunities for companies, enterprise networks and industry representatives to get involved in these efforts.

Organisations providing direct support to researchers at risk, such as the Scholars at Risk Network, the Council for Assisting At-Risk Academics, the Scholar

Rescue Fund, the Philipp Schwartz Initiative, the French National PAUSE programme, and others endeavour to match researchers at risk with higher education institutions, and are also interested in assisting researchers at risk to find a career outside academia.

The EU co-funded [CARE project](#), demonstrated the need for greater awareness in the private sector of the presence of a diverse and largely untapped talent pool of researchers at risk.

Where can researchers at risk find advice about careers beyond academia?

Several Inspireurope webinars explore alternative career paths open to researchers at risk who may be considering a move from academia into the non-profit or private sectors:

- [Careers outside Academia](#) (November 2021)
- [Career assessment for researchers at risk](#) (2023)
- [Collaboration with industry and society to support researchers at risk](#) (2024)

Are there examples of initiatives that match researchers at risk with employers outside academia?

While organisations supporting researchers at risk assist individual researchers with transitions to positions outside of academia on a case-by-case basis, there is currently no dedicated initiative specifically matchmaking researchers at risk with employers outside of academia on a larger scale.

However, existing small-scale initiatives to match refugees with employers could provide useful models for future initiatives to place researchers at risk. Inspireurope is encouraging existing initiatives for refugees to consider opening up their programmes to researchers at risk, outside of the refugee process.

For instance, the [EURAXESS Internship Program for Refugee and Displaced Researchers in Europe](#) matches researchers with employers, and the Netherlands-based [Refugee Talent Hub](#) brings together refugees and employers in the Netherlands. Crucially, beyond matchmaking, it offers a range of services such as company visits, trainings and courses for up- or re-skilling, work experience programs and other work-related activities. The hub was initially created by the Dutch branch of [Accenture](#), a professional services company. Other national-level initiatives focus on recruiting highly skilled migrants and refugees into areas that face labour shortages, such as the

Swedish [Jobbsprånget](#) (with a focus on engineering, architecture, business or science graduates). The four-month internship programme run by the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA) matches refugees with Swedish employers in need of specific competence and experience. The international NGO [Tent Partnership for Refugees](#) mobilises the global business community to employ refugees or support them in other ways, and currently reaches out to over 200 major companies. Inspireurope is encouraging all such initiatives to widen access for researchers at risk to these opportunities.

Recommendation 7

Consider intersectionality in the support for researchers at risk

Are there examples of policy approaches that consider intersectionality?

The [George Washington University Intersectionality Research Institute](#) (GW IRI) offers a number of relevant resources including publications relating to intersectionality and structural inequality, quantitative and qualitative approaches to intersectionality, and descriptive and experiential analyses of intersectionality.

The GW IRI lists the benefits of intersectionality for research, policy, and practice as including:

- Access to “...the advantages of multiple ‘matrix’ (e.g., gender, race, sexual identity and class) perspectives for understanding the role of privilege and social inequality.”
- Ability to “make the experiences of ‘intersectionally invisible’ groups visible.”
- Capacity to “[c]entre the experiences of groups [such as at-risk researchers] marginalised by multiple and interlocking forms of oppression....”
- Scope to “[h]ighlight critical gaps in conventional logic, such as how research and policies developed for groups such as ‘women and minorities’ often neglect the experiences and needs of people who are both...”

Additionally, An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework (Hankivsky, O. Ed., 2012) provides a helpful compendium of intersectionality-based policy analysis (IBPA) questions to help shape future policies around at-risk researchers in terms of IPBA principles such as intersecting categories, multi-level analysis, power, reflexivity, time and space, diverse knowledges, social justice, and equity.

Recommendation 8 Enhance visa pathways for researchers at risk

What visa pathways do researchers at risk use to enter and reside in Europe?

Most researchers at risk enter Europe via a researcher/scientific visa. This is usually a long-stay visa, on the basis of a hosting agreement with a higher education or research institution in the host country. While the rights afforded under scientific/researcher visas vary across EU member states, in most countries there are provisions for family members to join the researcher.

For those who face risks in their home countries, the researcher/scientific visa pathway acts as a complementary pathway to protection, defined by UNHCR as “safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement resettlement by providing lawful stay in a third country where their international protection needs are met. They are additional to resettlement and do not substitute the protection afforded to refugees under the international protection regime. Complementary pathways include existing admission avenues that refugees may be eligible to apply to, but which may require operational adjustments to facilitate refugee access” ([UNHCR Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees – Key Considerations](#) (2019, p. 5). Due to their highly skilled background, researchers at risk often qualify for labour mobility schemes, “[...] by which a person may enter or stay in another country through safe and regulated avenues for purposes of employment, with the right to either permanent or temporary residence” ([UNHCR online, 2022](#)).

What is the European policy context for visas of researchers at risk?

The relevant EU directive addressing the mobility of third-country researchers is the [Directive \(EU\) 2016/801](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. The directive sets out several rules of relevance to researchers at risk. It provides for immediate family reunification for non-EU family members of non-EU researchers, access to the labour market and intra-EU mobility for researchers. An important provision in the directive, of particular value to researchers at risk, is permission to stay on in the territory for the purposes of job-seeking for a period of at least nine months following completion of their research. With

regard to intra-EU mobility, the directive allows for mobility of up to six months per member state without a notification procedure, and mobility for more than six months per member state by notification or application. Unfortunately, however, there are important differences in how EU member states transpose the directive into national legislation.

Inspireurope welcomed the new [EU Blue Card](#) rules introduced in September 2021 to create more flexible criteria for entry to the EU by highly skilled third country nationals. While some researchers at risk can meet the prerequisites for an EU Blue Card, many are unable to meet the salary threshold criteria, despite them having been reduced in 2021.

Further information and resources on visa pathways to Europe for researchers at risk, including links to the relevant national information on researcher/scientific visas, is available on the Inspireurope [website](#). The [EU Immigration Portal](#) also provides general information about coming to work in the EU. A 2024 [update](#) of the EU Visa Code Handbook provides detailed guidelines on accommodating the specific needs of human rights defenders within the existing provisions of the EU Visa Code.

How can higher education institutions and NGOs working with researchers at risk support the enhancement of visa pathways?

Host institutions and NGOs can inform relevant national authorities about visa issues faced, and collaborate with them to enhance visa procedures for researchers at risk.

France and Greece serve as examples of countries that have successfully established such collaborations: In France, this has been achieved through the “[Passeport Talent](#)” visa facilitated by the PAUSE program (hosted by the Collège de France). In Greece, a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) was initiated by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Migration.

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