

Inspireurope Project: Feedback to the European Commission's Communication on the Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education, and Youth

Summary: The EU-funded Inspireurope project welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the European Commission's Communication on the Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education, and Youth. Inspireurope submits that academic freedom and support for researchers at risk should be clear and visible priorities within the EU's approach to research and innovation activities with global partners. Inspireurope begins from the view that excellence in research depends upon open scientific debate, and is driven by a multiplicity of ideas, people and perspectives. When researchers are at risk, and excluded from participating in the global research circuit, the quality, the very future of research is also at stake. In this submission, Inspireurope proposes one concrete way for the European Union to demonstrate commitment to academic freedom and related core values: an EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk.

About Inspireurope: [Inspireurope](#) is a [10-partner](#) project funded under the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and coordinated by [Scholars at Risk Europe](#) at Maynooth University, Ireland. Inspireurope facilitates transnational cooperation across Europe to support researchers at risk. As pressures on academic freedom are growing around the world, so too are pressures on individual researchers. Inspireurope partners join forces across Europe to respond. Inspireurope's activities include policy recommendations to strengthen European support for researchers at risk; exchange and mutual learning between key actors in research and innovation; training and guidance for researchers at risk; training and guidance for employers; growing the network of actors supporting researchers at risk, especially in Central, Eastern & Southern Europe and in the non-academic sector.

Definitions & Standards

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

While some researchers at risk have recognised refugee status, asylum status, 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/work permits through visiting research/scholar positions at host universities outside their home countries. For further background on the risks facing researchers and the top source countries for requests for assistance, please see the draft Inspireurope recommendation for an EU fellowship scheme available [here](#).

Academic freedom: In accordance with the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel, academic freedom includes the “freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom [of higher education personnel] 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.”¹ The recent UN Special Rapporteur's Report on Academic Freedom further defines academic freedom as: “[T]he freedom of individuals, as members of academic communities (e.g., faculty, students, staff, scholars, administrators and community participants) or in their own pursuits, to conduct activities involving the discovery and transmission of information and ideas, and to do so with the full protection of human rights law.”²

Academic freedom is fully and independently grounded in rights to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to education, and the right to the benefits of science, as articulated, respectively, in Article 19 of the International

¹ UNESCO, “Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel,” November 11, 1997, para.27.

² Report of the [United Nations] Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, 28 July 2020, A/75/150 (report on academic freedom).



Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (opinion and expression), and Articles 13 (right to education) and 15 (right to scientific advancements) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union at Article 13 states that the “arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected”. In support of this provision, the Charter provides for the freedom of expression and information in Article 11, the freedom of assembly and of association in Article 12 and the right to education in Article 14.³

Inspireurope Recommendation for EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk

EU support for individual at-risk scholars is slipping between the cracks of higher education and human rights programming. Individual at-risk scholars are not currently availing of EU funding in significant numbers, whether funding for human rights defenders or for EU-funded research fellowships. With regard to EU fellowships funded through Horizon 2020, their eligibility criteria (particularly mobility rules), application and evaluation processes make them inaccessible to most at-risk scholars. The scale and eligibility criteria of existing EIDHR/ProtectDefenders.eu support for human rights defenders means that current mechanisms are not meeting the needs of at-risk scholars.

An October 2020 mapping report, [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe’s Response](#), authored by the European University Association as part of the EU-funded [Inspireurope](#) project provides more detail on the need for an EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk. SAR Europe’s assessment of the obstacles facing at-risk scholars accessing existing EU funding for HRDs is available [here](#). More material support for at-risk scholars is urgently needed to enable individual scholars to continue their work in safety, either through the provision of remote fellowships if the scholar can remain in the home country or home region or through temporary positions elsewhere, until such time as a safe return is possible. In addition to providing urgent support to individual scholars, dedicated EU support for at-risk scholars would serve to publicly highlight the central role that scholars and academic freedom play in EU research and innovation strategic priorities.

A detailed draft proposal prepared by the Inspireurope project for an EU fellowship scheme is available [here](#).

Related Resources

- [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe’s Response, Report of the Inspireurope Project, European University Association, October 2020.](#)
- [DRAFT Inspireurope Recommendation for an EU Fellowship Scheme for Researchers at Risk](#)
- [SAR Europe Input to European Commission’s Communication on the Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education, and Youth, April 2021](#)
- [EUA Input to European Commission’s Communication on the Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education, and Youth, April 2021](#)
- [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, Adopted at the Ministerial Conference on the European Research Area, October 2020](#)
- [Free to Think 2020, Report of Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project](#)
- [UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Report on Academic Freedom, July 2020](#)
- [2020 Council of Europe Recommendation and Resolution on Threats to Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions in Europe](#)
- [Monitoring: Academic Freedom Index & SAR’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project](#)
- [European Parliament Recommendation on Defence of Academic Freedom in the EU’s External Action, November 2018](#)

³ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2012/C 326/02.

