



Photo courtesy of Maura Boyle.

#### **QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER Q4 2020**

Welcome to the final edition of our newsletter for 2020: a year that has posed major challenges for everyone, both personally and professionally.

We hope that you and your families have been weathering the storm safely, and took the opportunity of the Christmas break to recharge, recalibrate, and to start to think ahead to how your company can adapt to the emerging world in 2021.

In this issue, we will explore how a scheme to rescue researchers from persecution has had major benefits for European companies, and look at ways in which we can help and support your business adapt to the challenges of the future.

MaynoothWorks encompasses knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship innovation and enterprise partnership.  
[www.maynoothuniversity.ie/maynoothworks](http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/maynoothworks)

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### **ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORLD: PARTNERING WITH MAYNOOTHWORKS**

The COVID pandemic has brought unprecedented disruption to the lives of millions of people, and has changed the map for business operations faster than any other event in living memory. The enforced development of tools to facilitate working from home has changed the office and high street forever, and business models that were vibrant and dynamic eighteen months ago are now facing existential threats.

Such disruption also offers opportunity to agile businesses, however. New market needs have sprung up as people adapt to changing environments, and the combination of broad government support and a year of caution and frustration for investors means that 2021 offers an excellent opportunity for business innovation.

MaynoothWorks are here to support your company's development and evolution: we offer unrivalled facilities and expertise across a broad swathe of disciplines, while our experience and integration with the Irish and EU funding environments mean that we can help you to deliver true innovation in an extremely cost-effective way. Projects can be as short as a week or can stretch into multi-year collaborative programs to develop whole new product families. Contact the team on [maynoothworks@mu.ie](mailto:maynoothworks@mu.ie) to find out how we can help you.

Alternatively, if you have spotted a new gap in the market, let us help you develop your ideas towards a commercial reality. Our Business Innovation Centre offers extensive support and access to funding, coupled to our unique Balanced Innovation Model which provides rolling assessment and tailored assistance as your idea develops. The Centre is fully equipped with purpose-built

laboratory space, and we are investing in prototyping and test facilities to give you the best possible environment to build your demonstrator models.

Remote-working companies can also benefit from our facilities: we offer competitively priced membership allowing your company to register an address at the Centre without the overhead of a full-time desk rental. Such membership also offers access to

our meeting rooms, and to our new Flexi-Office which offers professional recording, broadcasting and green-screen facilities to support your sales and investment pitching activities to remote clients. You will also benefit from our portfolio of members' meetings, mentorship, pitch competitions, and networking events – building a true innovation ecosystem in Ireland's East Midlands region. Contact [maynoothworks.bic@mu.ie](mailto:maynoothworks.bic@mu.ie) to find out more.

## SCHOLARS AT RISK: RESCUED RESEARCHERS REWARD REGIONAL ECONOMIES

The shelling hit Damascus in 2012. Professor Souad Odeh, a lecturer in information science, knew she had to escape the escalating Syrian civil war. She made her way to France, and now works in Lyon for [FI Group](#), a multinational firm specialising in the management of R&D tax reliefs and R&D grants.

In 2017, Professor Jeff Wilkesman, a biochemist, watched on in horror and disbelief as the military stormed the grounds of his campus, Universidad de Carabobo in Valencia, Venezuela. A few months later, he and his wife, also a biochemist, relocated to Mannheim. He now works at the [Institute of Biological Process Engineering](#) in Mannheim, Germany.

Over the past year, Scholars at Risk (SAR), an international network of over 540 institutions across 40 countries working to protect scholars and promote academic freedom, reported on 341 attacks on higher education and scholars, including 124 scholars who were killed, attacked or disappeared.

But these data reflects only a sample of attacks on higher education that have occurred over the past year. It does not include the many researchers who are silently intimidated by oppressive regimes, and not all researchers are lucky enough to escape. For over 20 years, SAR, which has its European office at [Maynooth University](#) in Ireland, has been supporting scholars from high-risk countries to access academic positions.

In 2020, SAR received nearly 500 applications for assistance and arranged 143 positions of academic refuge, with the majority of scholars coming from Turkey, Yemen, Syria, Brazil and Iran.

There are more qualified candidates for academic positions than places available. At the same time, a [study](#) by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training found that 40% of EU businesses have difficulties finding staff with the right skills, particularly in ICT, medicine, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and teaching.



*Photo caption: (l-r); Robert Quinn, Founding Executive Director, Scholars at Risk Network; Sinead O'Gorman, Director, SAR Europe; Prof. Linda Connolly, Director, Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute (MUSSI); Professor Philip Nolan, President, Maynooth University*

Now, the [Inspireurope](#) project, coordinated by SAR Europe at Maynooth University, is exploring ways to support the placement of highly-skilled researchers into industries with skills shortages.

"It can be hard to obtain an academic position in Europe, even for researchers with many years' experience," says Orla Duke, Programme Manager of SAR Europe. "Through conversations with [MaynoothWorks](#), the commercialisation office and business incubation centre of Maynooth University, we realised that there's potential for industry to avail of the skills of researchers at risk by supporting, hosting and employing them."

Inspireurope has been exploring opportunities across Europe, including Google, EuroScience and Enterprise Europe and, to date, has held [two dedicated webinars and two workshops for organisations](#) interested in hosting and employing researchers at risk.

Who is at risk, what is at risk, and why? SAR says that scholars, professors, researchers, doctoral students, institutional leaders and other members of higher education committees face threats when their ideas or opinions are considered to be a challenge by authorities or other groups.

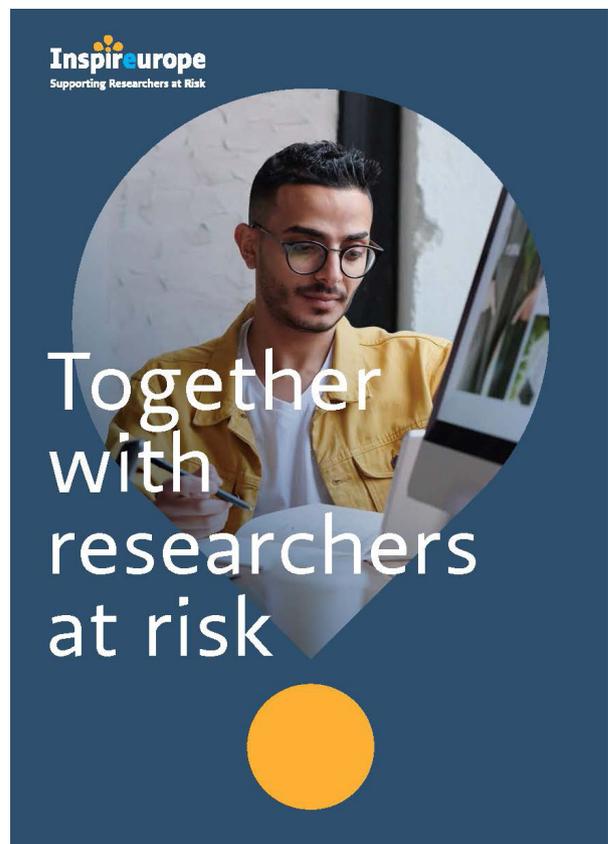
They are also at risk when they are prominent members of their community, especially if they are a member of a political, ethnic, or religious minority, female, or a member of the LGBTIQ+ community. Others are at risk as a result of their peaceful exercise of basic human rights, in particular, the right to freedom of expression or freedom of association. Threats can come from governments, police, military, armed extremist groups and, sometimes, even members of their own higher education communities.

“In Venezuela, people who criticised the government or posted information about protests on social media were disappeared or arrested and held indefinitely,” says Wilkesmann. “My wife knows this: she witnessed the entry of the military on campus, and suddenly our family were threatened. We watched as valued faculty members were arrested for writing about the economic situation in Venezuela. We both applied for a fellowship with the [Philip Schwartz Initiative](#), supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and SAR. In Carababo, we worked with thermophilic microorganisms, which thrive in higher temperatures, and our work in Germany has helped to develop more environmentally beneficial processes to treat pulp for paper.”

When she left Syria, Souad initially sought refuge in Iraq, where she worked as a professor in Baghdad’s Diljah University College, but her husband, a theatre artiste, was threatened by extremists.

“In 2014, I contacted my PhD supervisor in France, who offered me a one-year research contract in the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (National Conservatory for Arts and Trades). I came with my family and, initially, conducted research into the economics of metadata, with a focus on how metadata is increasingly essential for organising digital information. It was difficult to secure a permanent academic position because my role in Syria was focused on teaching due to the lack of research infrastructure. I’m now in industry, working as a technical consultant. I help our client in the preparation of R&D scientific files and declarations and provide them with technical support during possible tax audits.”

Odeh and Wilkesmann were employed because their skills are valuable, but there’s no doubt that the life and experiences of researchers at risk brings much-needed diversity and fresh perspectives to both industry and academia. Indeed, 2019 research from the World Economic Forum shows that diversity brings increased profitability and creativity, as well as better governance.



“Helping scientific refugees to get a professional opportunity inside or outside academia benefits everyone. I feel very lucky to have a job related to my domain of study, which isn’t the case for many Syrian refugees despite their high academic qualifications”.

“The support of the private sector is so valuable to academics at risk,” says Wilkesmann. “For us, it’s the chance to live a normal, stable life and thrive academically. We have a lot to contribute to industry, so we feel it’s been a win-win for us and for our host country.”

### Get involved

Companies, enterprise networks and industry representatives can get involved with the Inspireurope project through diversity and inclusion partnerships, skills training, mentoring schemes, speaker invitations for online events and meetings and, (post-pandemic), in-person speaking. Inspireurope is also developing dedicated placement and job schemes for researchers at risk.

There are many funding opportunities available for companies to employ researchers (not just researchers at risk). For more information, see [Inspireurope](#) or contact [Inspireurope@mu.ie](mailto:Inspireurope@mu.ie)