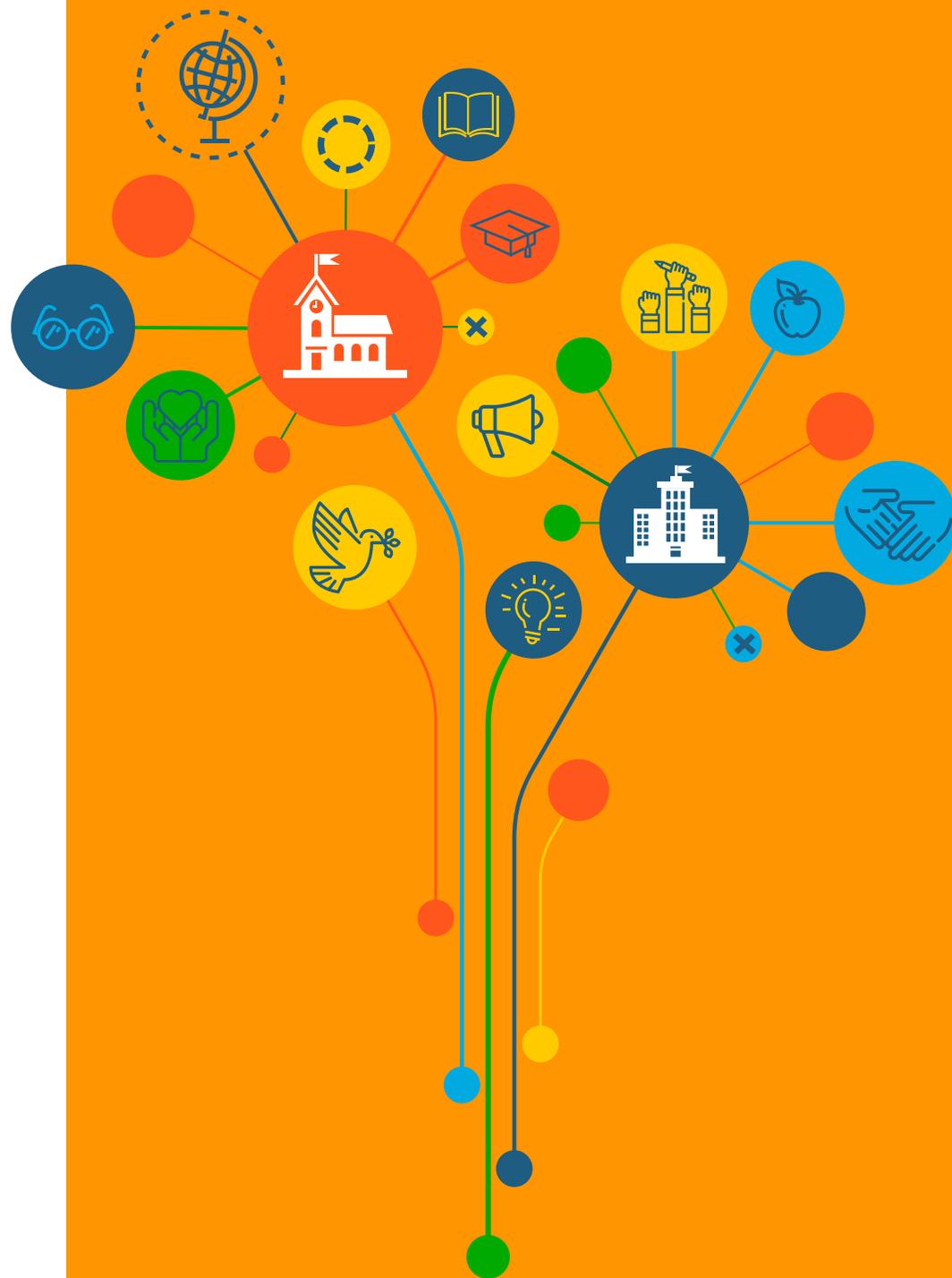


Pathways to **PRACTICE**

— A PRACTITIONER'S TOOLKIT —

WELCOMING SCHOLARS AT RISK TO CAMPUS GETTING STARTED

By Marit Egner & Karolina Catoni



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We achieve this mission through a combination of training, conferences and knowledge acquisition and sharing. We partner with key stakeholder organisations and institutions to promote our membership's interests and advance international higher education in Europe and the rest of the world.

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TOPIC IN CONTEXT

In conflicts or other situations of unrest, scholars and their critical questions are often seen as a threat to power and therefore silenced. When scholars are persecuted for their work, it is a threat to academia and the society at large. Peaceful dialogue is an important cornerstone for democracy and tolerance. By safeguarding dialogue and academic freedom, higher education serves as an important tool for change.

We can discuss academic freedom and the general importance of searching for truth, but there is also a need to show solidarity and give concrete assistance to threatened scholars from around the world. The focus here is not on refugee students/academics who are already residing in Europe, but on scholars who are at risk in their home countries due to persecution and therefore need to find a safe place to continue working.

There are several organisations and networks providing assistance to scholars in need of protection. [Scholars at Risk](#) (SAR) is one of the biggest international networks with more than 450 higher education institutions. The [Scholar Rescue Fund](#) (SRF) is a fellowship programme supporting threatened scholars worldwide. Several countries have national programmes or hubs, such

as [CARA](#) in the UK, [UAF](#) in the Netherlands, the [Philipp Schwartz Initiative](#) in Germany and [PAUSE](#) in France. These networks and initiatives cooperate to increase the total number of at-risk scholars assisted.

Over the past few years, the number of scholars seeking assistance has almost tripled. SAR now receives 70–80 applications per month from threatened scholars around the world.

There could be different reasons why a scholar is at risk. It could be due to the conduct of a controversial or regime-critical area of research, a status that the scholar holds, a political or civic engagement or due to a political conflict in the home country where scholars are highly targeted.

“ I left my country because of the potential risks that targeted my life such as assassination, kidnapping, arrest and attack. This happened because of my political-critical articles...
— SAR scholar

“ I left my country because I was suspended for teaching feminism at a state university, and there were threats to my life in local papers by religious extremists accusing me of blasphemy.
— SAR scholar

The geography of threats can also vary over time and follow the political developments in the world. In the 1930s scholars from Germany were hosted in Turkey, as they had to leave the Nazi regime. Over the past years, Turkish universities received scholars from Syria, but in 2016, a high number of Turkish scholars were fired or arrested and hundreds of those applied to SAR for assistance. Since January 2016, the organisation has received more than 500 applicants from Turkey.

WHAT PROBLEM DOES IT SOLVE?

Higher education institutions in safe locations can assist persecuted scholars by hosting them as guest researchers or in temporary positions. In this way the scholar receives a sanctuary, a moment of peace, while developing as a researcher and increasing his/her academic network.

“ *In my specific case, the position provided by the network enabled me to realise a significant academic progress; the placement is a magnificent platform where I could continue my intellectual production without fear or intimidation.*
— SAR scholar

The hosting institution in return receives a skilled researcher who can contribute to the actual area of research and education but also through their presence indirectly contribute to a better understanding for academic freedom, internationalisation, inclusive education and other essential core university values.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Hosting a threatened scholar requires both broad and top-down involvement at the institution. Financial support is normally awarded at the leadership level and support from several administrative functions will be necessary both on the central level and the department level. The relevant academic department will be the day-to-day environment for the scholar at the institution.



TERMINOLOGY

Academic freedom:

the right of academic staff to ask questions, conduct research and disseminate results without interference

Persecution:

systematic mistreatment (eg censorship, harassment, torture) of a person or group

Scholar at risk:

someone with academic training who is or has been a researcher, lecturer or both and whose academic freedom is restricted

Hosting scholars:

receiving individual scholars at the higher education institution campus for a limited period

Scholars at Risk (SAR):

an international network of more than 450 universities working to promote academic freedom and protect threatened scholars

Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF):

a fellowship programme under the Institute of International Education (IIE) to facilitate visiting appointments for threatened scholars at partner universities

KEY STEPS

IN THE PROCESS

This is a guide to the process of receiving your first threatened scholar through Scholars at Risk, Scholar Rescue Fund or other similar organisations. It will help you to establish a system for receiving and successfully welcoming at-risk scholars to your campus.

1. Preparing the institution for hosting a scholar
2. Recruiting and welcoming the scholar
3. Making the most out of the stay
4. What next?

1. PREPARING THE INSTITUTION FOR HOSTING A SCHOLAR

a. Learn from others

Find out if there are other institutions in your country or region who already host threatened scholars and how they organise the hosting. See the list of resources on page 13, eg the Scholars at Risk handbook: 'How to host'. Collect examples and pitfalls.

b. Discuss with university leadership if and how the university might contribute

Present the area of work, efforts needed and proposed budget to the institutional leadership. It is important that the full complexity of the question is presented, eg what measures in security might be necessary to take depending on the needs of the scholar. If you are not a member of Scholars at Risk, you should consider becoming a member.

Some institutions would like to have the system (and exceptions) in place first, while others become more engaged when they have a specific scholar to help.

c. Make sure the initiative is known

Create a broad engagement internally at the institution about the decision to be a member of SAR and/or host a scholar. This is important later when you are reaching out for a host department and other involvement. Start a dialogue with those who are normally involved in different steps of receiving guest researchers and new international staff, such as human resources, security management, international office, welcome services/guest housing, communication, etc. Even though you want to

make the initiative known, it might be difficult to use SAR/SRF scholars in this effort, because you need to take their security into consideration.

d. Decide on some procedures and an ideal timeline

The work with the at-risk scholars needs a mix of organisation and flexibility. It is good to agree on who will be responsible for deciding on which scholar to invite, which department will host, how the costs will be covered/divided, and an ideal timeline. You should also find out and decide on which legal status and type of position/fellowship is relevant to use at your institution.

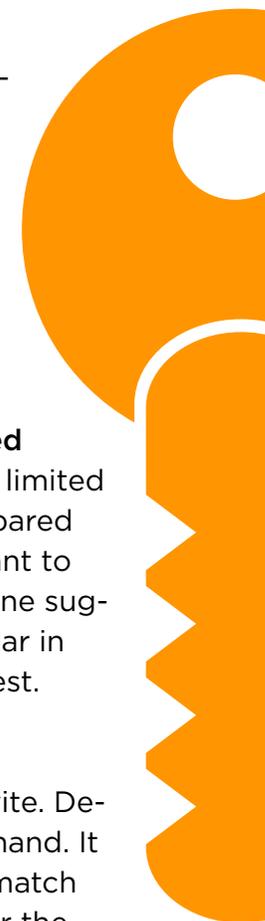
2. RECRUITING AND WELCOMING THE SCHOLAR

a. Get proposals from SAR and/or SRF of scholars in need

Inform SAR/SRF that you are ready to host. If you have a limited scope of disciplines and/or timeline in which you are prepared to host or family size you can accommodate, it is important to inform about this. Preferably, you should get more than one suggestion from SAR/SRF, but there might also be one scholar in particularly high need at the moment that they will suggest.

b. Discuss and decide on priorities for scholar and host

It is up to the institution to decide which candidate to invite. Deciding on a scholar and a host department goes hand in hand. It is of utter importance to recruit a scholar that is a good match for the institution and the hosting department in order for the scholar to grow as a researcher during the placement. Preferably, it is a situation of mutual benefit. Sometimes it is possible to



use an online interview in the recruitment, but it depends on the location of the scholar. It is a puzzle to match all scholars with hosts, so the same candidates might be subject for selection at several possible hosting institutions.

c. Prepare contract, housing, immigration and travel

The immigration formalities differ from country to country and depending on the type of position/fellowship. In some countries, the scholars are employed in the same way as other international researchers, while in others they receive fellowships. Find out which legal status/residence permit is best in your country. With a residence and work permit as an employed skilled worker/researcher, you normally have more rights in the system. We don't recommend applying for political asylum/refugee status, as it gives many restrictions and new challenges for the scholar and is of a more permanent character than what is normally needed.

If the university has researcher/guest housing available, this would be good for the scholar, who would normally want to keep a low profile. It is normally good if the university can buy tickets, etc, for the scholar instead of reimbursing afterward. Many at-risk scholars don't have the liquidity or functioning credit cards to pay for such costs.

d. Welcome the scholar

During the first days in the country it is good to have a plan for the introduction and welcome: who the scholar needs to meet and who will be contact persons for different purposes. This will be similar to other international researchers, but at-risk academics

coming directly from the home countries have a particular need for feeling safe in the arrival phase. Discuss security of the scholar with the scholar and relevant persons at the university early.

3. MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE STAY

a. Safety and well-being

Upon arrival, many scholars feel insecure. In some cases it is necessary to implement special security measures, but in most cases it is enough to avoid publishing personal information about the scholar on the university webpage. It is advisable for the host institution to provide the scholar with contact information for counseling and other support services available.

“ *The most important issue for me after arrival in Norway was to remain anonymous and unidentifiable for security reasons, as there is a huge community from my home country in Oslo... After a lapse of one year, I was relatively more relaxed, and did get my profile and photo on the website.*

— SAR scholar

b. Academic activity and network

With a good match, there will be a win-win situation for the scholar and host unit. Some scholars come with data that they want to analyse and publish. Others are ready to participate in projects at the host institution. It is important to help the scholar to create networks and to identify the appropriate professional development opportunities, library sources and publishing channels. It is a good idea to give the

scholar a mentor/academic contact person, who will be guiding the scholar into the new academic community.

“ *The host department should prepare a plan of the stay that contains an integration of the scholar in at least one of the research projects in the host department... I think he should feel that he is a part of a team and not only a guest.*

— SAR scholar

c. Competence development

Discuss with the scholar whether he/she is willing to participate in competence development in addition to the research activities. Is there a relevant language course, pedagogy course, career development course or funds for participating in conferences?

“ *I would like to encourage myself and my colleagues to take the occasion to increase their knowledge through attending educational training and pedagogic courses, and participating in lectures, conferences and workshops that take place in these educational centers. Exchanging thought and ideas is vital in order to shape research plans and projects, the mentioned activities form a unique opportunity to build competent candidates for the next step after the SAR stay.*

— SAR scholar

d. Social network

It is a challenge to ensure that the scholar gets a good social network in the host country. The host unit might have regular social events, but it cannot be expected to be the only network. Discuss with the scholar if there would be any relevant NGOs that he/she could join. Former SAR scholars could also have a mentoring role.

4. WHAT NEXT?

a. Preparing for next steps

All scholars receive information about the temporary nature of the SAR/SRF stay, and the host institution can help in managing expectations and discussing opportunities. It could be good to connect the scholar with a career coach early during the hosting period in order to plan for the next steps after the hosting.

b. What are the alternatives after the stay?

- Return to the home country, if the situation has improved
- Get a regular job in the host country (within or outside academia)
- Extend the stay at the same institution
- Find a new host institution in the same country or another country
- Apply for asylum
- Look into other funding possibilities, take part in applications for external research funding



SUCCESS CHECKLIST

- ✍ All cases of scholars at risk differ from each other due to previous situations and experiences.
- ✍ The scholars at risk are often in difficult situations, so hosting scholars will demand great flexibility from the hosting institution.
- ✍ Make sure to discuss the security-related issues with the scholar before taking any actions in communication.
- ✍ Many scholars have family, either accompanying the scholar or in the home country. Their well-being and security will be a constant concern of the scholar.
- ✍ The academic year goes by quickly, so scholars should be encouraged to think 'what's next?' early in the visit.



TAKE- AWAYS

It is our hope that there will be less need for relocating scholars in the future, but at least for the moment, the need seems to be rising. By assisting the scholars to leave a threatening situation, we can help them to continue their work in peace. It has also been reported that scholars in countries with low academic freedom get some hope from knowing that there is a strong network out there. The knowledge and experience from hosting SAR/SRF scholars can also easily be transferred to work with the integration of newly-arrived refugee academics.

“ *The most important thing was the support, the understanding and the hope that I will have the opportunity to work in a free academic world.*
— SAR scholar



FURTHER READING

Sources of statistical data vary from country to country. For a general overview, the OECD's *Education at a Glance* provides country-specific highlights. Links to additional reports here:

-  [Scholars at Risk](#)
-  [Academic Freedom Monitor](#)
-  [SAR How to Host Handbook](#)
-  [Scholar Rescue Fund](#)
-  [Academic Refuge \(Erasmus+ strategic partnership\)](#)
-  [Magna Charta Observatory](#)
-  [UNESCO recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personne](#)

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