

DRAFT Recommendation for a dedicated EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk

Summary

[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. 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. The project partners include global leaders in the provision of support for researchers at risk. By joining forces in this way, Inspireurope is coordinating and strengthening support across Europe for researchers at risk.

There is excellent work already underway in Europe in support of researchers at risk. A number of NGOs/support organisations (four of which are represented in the Inspireurope consortium) arrange temporary positions for researchers at risk at higher education institutions to enable them to continue their work safely. However, as outlined below, 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.

This document summarises existing support in Europe and the continuing pressing needs of researchers at risk. The findings of [Inspireurope's](#) consultation processes¹ align closely with the experience of organisations inside and outside the consortium involved in the direct support of researchers at risk over several decades² in identifying the top two obstacles currently facing researchers at risk seeking positions in Europe as:

- (1) shortage of dedicated funding for positions/fellowships for researchers at risk; and
- (2) competitiveness of the academic labour market in Europe.

To address the serious shortfall in support, the [Inspireurope project](#) recommends the establishment of a dedicated EU fellowship scheme for researchers at risk. This document provides background on the need for such a scheme (items 1 to 10 below), and proposes a preliminary outline of a future scheme (item 11). The [Inspireurope](#) project partners welcome an opportunity to discuss these ideas further with interested parties.

¹ Inspireurope consultation processes included: surveys of 113 researchers at risk, 127 host institutions and organisations, and 20 NGOs/support organisations inside and outside the consortium, conducted by the European University Association (EUA) (Feb-July 2020); focus group in Krakow; discussions with participants & speakers during webinars, online workshops and events between Sept 2019 and August 2020; and regular meetings/discussions with consortium partners. The Inspireurope consortium includes amongst its members global leaders in the provision of support to researchers at risk, including the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) which has arranged over 1400 positions at 300 host campuses over 20 years, the French national PAUSE programme (which places approx. 100 researchers at risk per year in France), the Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (which places approximately 65 researchers at risk per year in Germany), and the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF) in the Netherlands with 80+ years of experience in academic refugee integration in Europe.

² The largest of today's global and national initiatives involved in the protection of at-risk scholars and researchers include: the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), the Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF), the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara), the French national PAUSE programme at the College de France, and the Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH), Germany.

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1. Who are researchers at risk?

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. (More specific eligibility criteria for the different proposed fellowship tracks are outlined in point 11 below).

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 in Europe or elsewhere, outside their home countries.

2. 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 5,000+ applications for assistance the Network has received since its founding in 2000. Based on over 20 years' experience receiving requests for assistance from at-risk scholars, professors, researchers, doctoral students, institutional leaders and other members of higher education communities, SAR identifies three broad categories of risk reported:

- a) 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.
- b) Risk because of the individual's status as academics/researchers. Because of 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, female, 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.

- c) Risk as a result of their peaceful exercise of basic human rights, in particular, the right to freedom of expression or freedom of association.³

3. Who threatens researchers?

Researchers report threats by a range of state and non-state actors, including armed militant and extremist groups, police and military forces, government authorities, and members of their own higher education communities.

4. What types of threats do researchers report?

Some examples of threats reported by researchers assisted by the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara) the IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF), and the Scholars at Risk Network include:

- a professor from Colombia who received death threats for his reports linking Colombian drug traffickers, local self-defence forces, and government officials;⁴
- an assistant professor in Yemen accused of treason and threatened with imprisonment after the partial destruction of his faculty by airstrikes because he refused rebel demands that he continue teaching his students in dangerous conditions, and was forced into hiding, unable to support his family;⁵
- A Syrian analytical chemist who faced risk in Syria not only due to the ongoing conflict, but due to her peaceful activism calling for an end to the regime's violence toward the Syrian people;⁶
- a professor from Pakistan who applied to SRF when Islamic clerics at her university in Pakistan brought charges against her that included blasphemy, an offense punishable by death;⁷
- a Turkish academic who came to the UK with a fellowship from Cara, after being forced to take early retirement from her job in retaliation for signing a petition in early 2016. The so-called 'Academics for Peace' petition criticised government policy in Turkey's Kurdish regions. She was summoned to return to Turkey to stand trial on a charge of 'propagandizing for a terrorist organisation';⁸
- a lecturer at a state-run university teaching hospital in Iraq, who was targeted by ISIS for refusing to come and work for them;⁹

³Excerpts from *How to Host: A Handbook for Higher Education Partners*, Scholars at Risk Network, available at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAR-How-to-Host-Handbook.pdf>

⁴ *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, Scholar Rescue Fund, 2012, available at: https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-articles/rescue_of_science_and_learning_0.pdf, p.10.

⁵ Cara Annual Report 2018-2019, p. 5, available at: <https://www.cara.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/190920-Annual-Report-2018-19-FINAL.pdf>

⁶ Scholars at Risk Network, 20th Anniversary Report, *20 Years of Helping Scholars and Promoting Academic Freedom*, p.19, available at: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SAR_20th-Anniversary-Report-2020.pdf

⁷ *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, Scholar Rescue Fund, 2012, available at: https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-articles/rescue_of_science_and_learning_0.pdf, p.10

⁸ Cara Annual Report 2018-2019, available at: <https://www.cara.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/190920-Annual-Report-2018-19-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Cara Annual Report, 2017-18, p. 3, available at: <https://www.cara.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2017-18-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf>

- a human rights lawyer and academic from Iran who advocates for the defence of women’s rights throughout the Islamic world. Her work led to her arrest and imprisonment in Iran and ultimately to her exile from her home country.¹⁰

The SAR Network reports that the types of threats reported by researchers/scholars applying to SAR for assistance range in scope and severity and include harassment, surveillance, denial of access or permissions, confiscation of notes and computers files, professional or personal slander or defamation, physical or sexual intimidation, arbitrary dismissal, internal or external exile, arrest on false charges, detention without trial, trial and imprisonment, torture, disappearance and extrajudicial killing. Requests for assistance have also been received from universities facing ideological pressure and censorship, imposition of national ideology, ideological revisionism, closing of schools and universities, suppression of strikes/protests, restrictions on travel, restrictions on information exchange, and discriminatory restrictions on academic resources.¹¹

5. Where do researchers at risk come from?









Support organisations within and outside the consortium have received requests for assistance from researchers at risk in over 100 countries. In 2019, the top source countries for scholars requesting assistance from NGOs/support organisations working in the field of scholar protection were Turkey, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Venezuela, and Cameroon. Over SAR’s first 20 years, the top 10 countries for scholars requesting assistance included Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, Yemen, Pakistan, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Egypt.

Country/Region	% caseload
Turkey	65%
Syria	13%
Sub-Saharan Africa	7%
Iran	4%
Iraq	3%
Other MENA	3%
Americas	2%
South Asia	1%
Central/Eastern/SE Asia	1%
Other Europe	1%

Source country/regions of scholars assisted by SAR in 2019

6. In which disciplines and at what career stages are researchers at risk?

The researchers seeking support come from a variety of research disciplines and are at different stages in their careers. Of the 124 researchers at risk assisted in 2019 by the [PAUSE programme at the Collège de France](#) and the [Philipp Schwartz Initiative \(PSI\)](#) at the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in

Scholar Disciplines	
	Social Sciences 32%
	Physical & Life Sciences 26%
	Arts & Humanities 16%
	Business & Finance 9%
	Law & Human Rights 5%
	Medicine & Public Health 5%
	Journalism & Writing 4%
	Mathematics & Info. Science 3%

Scholars assisted by SAR in 2019 by discipline

Germany, 48% have a background in humanities and social sciences, 32% in STEM and 20% in earth and life sciences. Of the researchers placed in France and Germany by these two organisations, 66% are at Assistant Professor/ Lecturer level, 25% are PhD students and 9% are at Professor/ Senior Research Fellow level. Of the 113 researchers who participated in a recent survey conducted by the Inspireurope project, 31% are in social sciences, journalism, and information, 24% are in arts and humanities, while 15% are in natural sciences. Of those who responded to the Inspireurope survey, 74% hold a PhD. The stages of the researchers’ career attainment are varied in the Inspireurope survey sample: a third of respondents describe

¹⁰ *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, Scholar Rescue Fund, 2012, available at: https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-articles/rescue_of_science_and_learning_0.pdf, p.10

¹¹ *How to Host: A Handbook for Higher Education Partners*, Scholars at Risk Network, p. 6, available at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAR-How-to-Host-Handbook.pdf>

themselves as researchers (R3), and about a quarter each as recognised researchers (R2), or leading researchers (R4).¹²

7. What is the scope/scale of the challenges facing researchers?

a. Reported attacks on researchers & higher education communities

SAR's [Academic Freedom Monitoring](#) project has, since 2011, documented severe attacks on researchers, scholars, students and higher education communities, implicating tens of thousands of victims in over 100 countries. These include killings, violence, and disappearances; wrongful prosecution and imprisonment; loss of position; improper travel restrictions and other severe or systemic issues. Due to limited data and monitoring resources these figures represent only a tiny fraction of the overall number of attacks occurring. SAR's 2020 *Free to Think* report, the sixth in a series of annual reports analysing attacks on higher education communities around the world, analyses 341 reported attacks in 58 countries that occurred between September 1, 2019, and August 31, 2020.¹³ SAR's 2019 and 2020 reports combined show the severity and scale of the problem through a number of prominent country situations:



- In Turkey, more than 7,500 higher education personnel have been directly targeted with dismissals, travel restrictions, and bans on public employment since January 2016, while countless other higher education scholars, administrators, students, and their family members have been indirectly impacted by those same measures as well the government orders to close universities.¹⁴
- In Brazil, pressures on university communities escalated leading up to and after the October 2018 presidential elections, resulting in violence targeting students and academic personnel. The 2019 report documents police raids on campuses, reports of minority students and scholars being threatened and attacked, and politically motivated legislative actions to limit academic freedom and institutional autonomy.¹⁵
- In India, political tensions have led to violent altercations between students, security forces, and off-campus groups, and have driven coercive legal actions and disciplinary measures targeting academics and students.¹⁶
- The 2020 report documents the ongoing struggle for freedom in Hong Kong and China as it has played out in and around the higher education.¹⁷ The 2019 report documented a spike in reported arrests, prosecutions and dismissals of scholars for their research, teaching and online expression.¹⁸

¹² Career stages as defined by the EURAXESS research profiles descriptors, available at: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors>

¹³ *Free to Think 2020*, Scholars at Risk Network, available at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2020/>

¹⁴ *Free to Think 2019*, Scholars at Risk Network, p. 28 available at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Scholars-at-Risk-Free-to-Think-2019.pdf>

¹⁵ *Free to Think 2019*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Free to Think 2020*, pp. 49-59.

¹⁷ *Free to Think 2020*, pp. 83-94.

¹⁸ *Free to Think 2019*, pp. 43-49. For more detailed documentation of pressures on academic freedom in China see *Obstacles to Excellence: Academic Freedom & China's Quest for World-Class Universities (2019)*, A Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, available at:

<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/obstacles-to-excellence-academic-freedom-chinas-quest-for-world-classuniversities/>

b. Applications from researchers at risk for assistance

A small number of NGOs/support organisations (four of which are represented in the Inspireurope consortium) arrange temporary positions for researchers at risk at higher education institutions around the world. Applications for assistance for 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. In particular, the ongoing pressures facing the higher education sector in Turkey¹⁹ have resulted in record-level numbers of scholars seeking assistance and safe refuge from support organisations and the universities who offer refuge. As an illustrative example, in October 2017, when the Academy in Exile, founded that year to offer fellowships to scholars from Turkey on the basis of applicants' academic merit and risk status, published its first call for applications from scholars from Turkey, they received 105 applications for six fellowships.²⁰ In addition to the pressures facing the higher education sector around the world, ongoing conflict and insecurity across many countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa have resulted in many refugee researchers attempting to resume their academic careers in Europe.

According to data collected in July 2020 by the Inspireurope project, SRF, Cara and SAR received a combined total of 2,200 requests for assistance from at-risk scholars over the last 2 years. Between these same three organisations, approximately 700 placements were arranged over the same timeframe. Between SAR, Cara, IIE-SRF, PAUSE, PSI, and the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF), in the Netherlands, (several of whom work jointly on placements) approximately 1,000 positions were organised over the past two years. Of this figure, 132 threatened researchers were placed in Germany (via PSI) and 199 in France (via PAUSE) in the past two years. In the same timeframe, 79% of all SAR's placements and 38% of all IIE SRF's placements were at European universities; while approximately 75% of Cara's placements were at European universities, primarily the UK. The top six host countries in Europe for positions arranged by SAR, PAUSE, PSI, SRF and Cara were: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Belgium and the UK.²¹ Both SAR and SRF also arrange a significant number of placements at higher education institutions in the United States and Canada, with SRF also organising 9% of its placements at higher education institutions in Jordan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has of course posed additional challenges for researchers at risk. These range from increased travel and immigration restrictions in both home and host countries which impacts on their ability to take up positions of refuge, to crackdowns on academics for questioning state responses that violate democratic standards or engage in deliberate distortion of information.

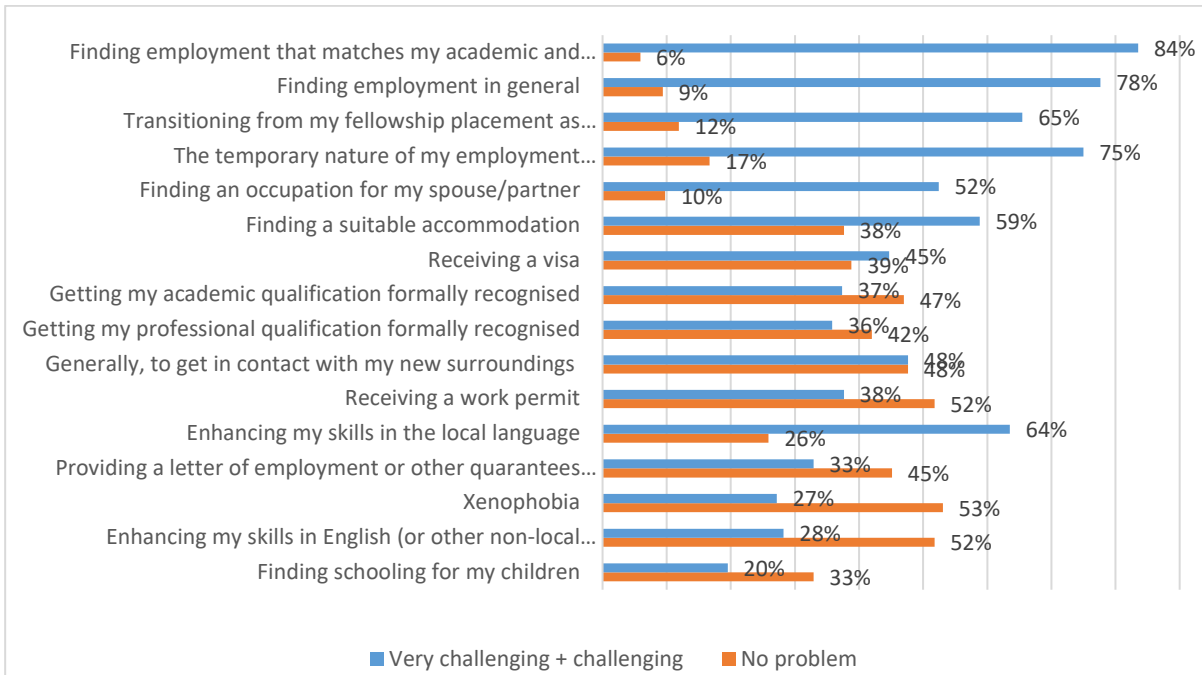
c. Obstacles facing researchers at risk in Europe

When researchers at risk were asked in the recent Inspireurope survey how they would rate the challenges they face, the top challenge reported was finding employment that matches their academic/professional qualifications:

¹⁹ *Free to Think 2020*, Scholars at Risk Network, p. 69-73.

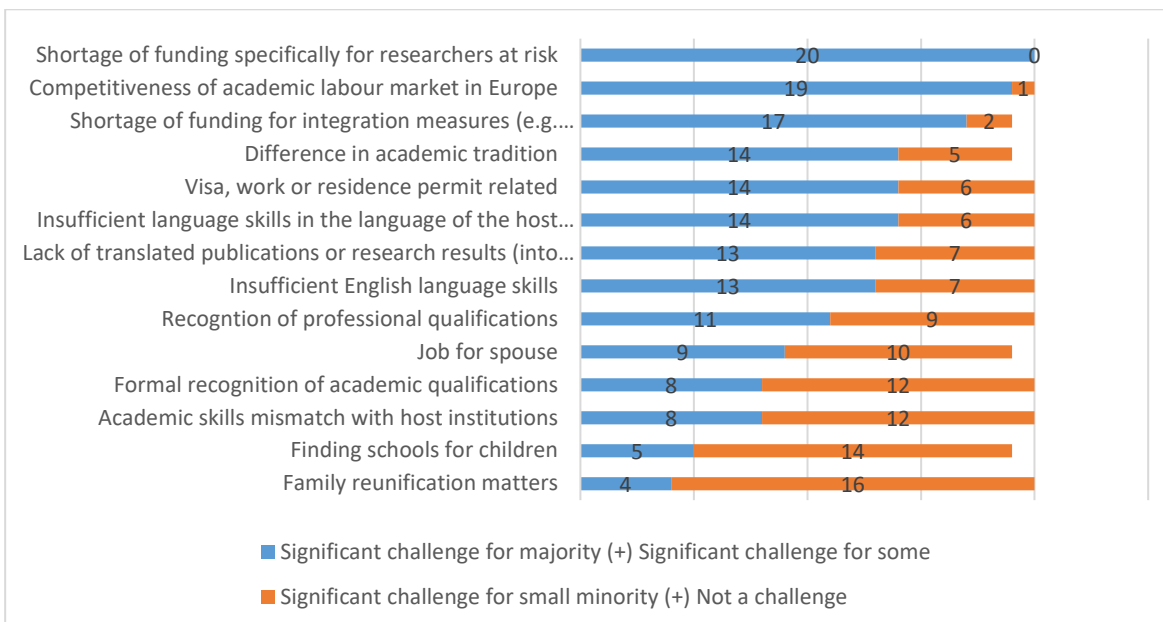
²⁰ Academy in Exile was founded in 2017 as a joint initiative of the Institute for [Turkish Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen](#), the [Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities \(KWI\) Essen](#) and the [Forum Transregionale Studien Berlin](#). <https://www.transcript-publishing.com/media/pdf/f9/6e/1b/oa9783839450130.pdf>

²¹ The top host countries in 2019 for Scholar Rescue Fund fellows were UK, Finland, Jordan, US, and Canada. More information available at : <https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/about-us/by-the-numbers/>



Q. 16 According to your experience as researcher at risk in Europe, how would you rate the following issues in your current country of residence?²²

When NGOs and support organisations were asked in a corresponding question in the same survey about the major obstacles facing researchers at risk who are seeking positions in Europe, there was unanimous agreement that a shortage of funding specifically for researchers at risk was the top obstacle faced, closely followed by the competitiveness of the academic labour market in Europe:



Q.12 to NGOs/support orgs: In your experience, what are the major obstacles facing at-risk researcher outside the refugee system and who are seeking positions in Europe?²³

²² Inspireurope questionnaire for researchers at risk, provided in Inspireurope mapping report, available at: <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/947:researchers-at-risk-mapping-europe%E2%80%99s-response.html>

²³ Based on responses to Inspireurope questionnaire for NGOs and other organisations supporting researchers at risk, June 2020. Due to the small number of NGOs/support organisations arranging positions for researchers at risk, data is displayed as count, not as percentages. Full data set provided in *Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response*, Report of the Inspireurope Project, available at: <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/947:researchers-at-risk-mapping-europe%E2%80%99s-response.html>

8. What support currently exists in Europe specifically for researchers at risk?

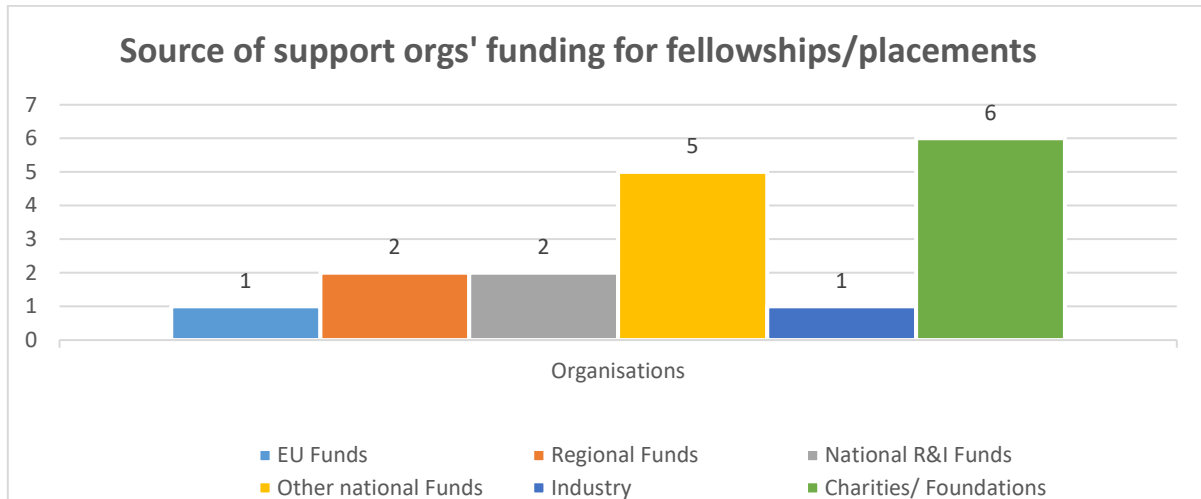
Although a number of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020-funded projects provide very valuable support to institutions and organisations offering career development opportunities for researchers at risk (see further below), there is currently **no dedicated European-level fellowship mechanism** for researchers at risk. There are, however, two State-funded national-level fellowship programmes in Europe for researchers at risk: in Germany (PSI launched in 2015, 65 fellowships per year), and in France (PAUSE programme launched in 2017, co-funding 100 fellowships per year). The PAUSE programme also benefits from funding from the European Union's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) which it dedicates towards co-funding fellowships for researchers at risk. In addition, there are a modest number of initiatives founded by and for researchers from Turkey, including Academy in Exile and Off-University, as well as several at sub-national level (e.g. Baden-Württemberg Fund for Persecuted Scholars in German), and at the institutional level (e.g. Université Libre de Bruxelles Solidarity Fund). As mentioned above, the Scholar Rescue Fund, the Scholars at Risk Network and Cara each place significant numbers of scholars at European universities.

Despite these efforts, overall, there are insufficient funding opportunities to cope with the demand for positions as outlined above. A shortage of fellowships and competitiveness of the academic labour market in Europe continue to be identified by researchers at risk and support organisations as the top two obstacles faced.

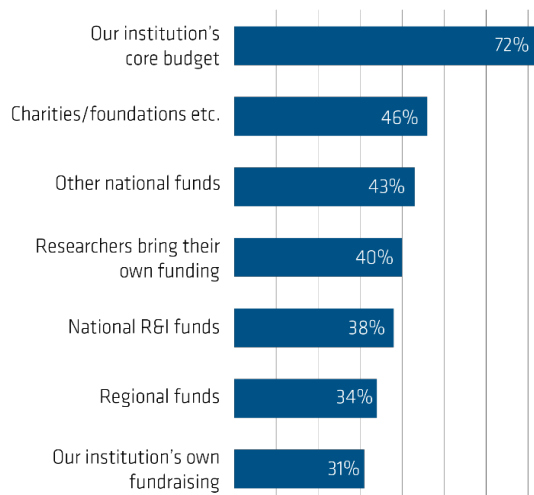
As outlined in *Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response*, a mapping report published by the Inspireurope project (October 2020), a number of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 funded projects provide support for collaboration between institutions and organisations in the provision of career development opportunities for researchers at risk, as well as mentoring, information and advice, webinars, skills training, speaking engagements, guidance materials and networking opportunities.²⁴ A preliminary list of such projects is available on the Inspireurope website. However, when it comes to funding positions and placements for researchers at risk, the Inspireurope mapping report shows that current support for positions/placements at higher education institutions in Europe are for the most part provided through:

- (a) **direct assistance from a small number of organisations whose mission is to assist at-risk scholars/researchers** (the largest of which are: [Scholar Rescue Fund](#), [Scholars at Risk](#), [Cara](#), French national [PAUSE](#) programme, [Philipp Schwartz Initiative](#) in Germany) in partnership with host universities across Europe.

²⁴ The report is based on findings from consultations with key stakeholders in Europe via questionnaires completed by researchers at risk, employers/hosts and organisations/NGOs supporting researchers at risk.



Q.9 If your organisation, section, or project provides funding for placements, what is the source of such fellowship funding²⁵



Q.7 Sources of funding for HEIs hosting & integration of researchers at risk

(b) **funding provided by the host higher education institutions themselves.** The breakdown by source of funding provided by higher education institutions to host researchers at risk was reported as follows:

Of the higher education institutions surveyed, 55% of those who are currently hosting or have recently hosted have benefitted from some external funding for hosting.²⁶ The European University Association (EUA) has found generally that for their members, hosting researchers at risk is, in particular, an issue of funding. Many institutions are willing to host, but as external fellowships for scholars are limited and institutions therefore need to fund fellowships themselves, this limits their capacity to host.

A small number of host institutions offer dedicated fellowships themselves, as well as a variety of support

services to welcome and integrate researchers into their institutions. The latter are often open to all international researchers, but some specific services (e.g. mentoring, career guidance) are in place at some institutions specifically for those with an at-risk background.

While European fellowship programmes (such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and European Research Council fellowships) and national fellowship programmes for all researchers are of course open also to researchers at risk, they are not widely accessible to most researchers at risk. The reasons for the inaccessibility of such mechanisms are outlined in section 9 below, and relate primarily to the fellowships' eligibility criteria (especially mobility rules and need for a supervisor at the application stage), the competitiveness of existing programmes, and the timeline for applications.

²⁵ Q.9, Inspireurope questionnaire for NGOs & other organisations supporting researchers at risk, June 2020. Based on responses from 20 support organisations. Due to the small number of NGOs/support organisations arranging positions for researchers at risk, data is displayed as count, not as percentages. Full data set will be published in Oct. 2020.

²⁶ Q.7 Inspireurope questionnaire for host institutions, March 2020. Based on responses from 127 host institutions in Europe.

9. Can researchers at risk access existing EU research fellowship funding?

While there is evidence from the Inspireurope surveys that greater awareness-raising is needed to ensure more researchers at risk know about the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) – part of Horizon 2020 - and European Research Council (ERC) fellowship programmes, it is clear that such programmes in their current formats are not accessible to most researchers at risk. The main reasons for such inaccessibility are as follows:

- (a) **Too competitive:** The MSCA and ERC fellowships are of course open to applications from all researchers (without specific provisions for candidates who are at risk). Such fellowships are highly sought after and oversubscribed. In 2019, 9,709 researchers applied for MSCA Individual Fellowships (IFs) and 1,351 fellowships were awarded, a success rate of 14%²⁷. While the overall success rate for ERC starter, consolidated and advanced grants in 2019 was 12%²⁸. This highlights how competitive the application process is even for those who have worked within well-resourced, stable institutions within stable countries their whole research lives.

Of the 113 respondents to the recent Inspireurope survey of researchers at risk, 14% of the sample have applied to MSCA individual fellowships (only 5% successfully) and 8% to the ERC (4% successfully). Of the same 113 respondents, 10% have successfully participated in Erasmus+ staff mobility and 5% have successfully applied for Erasmus+ collaboration projects.

Some researchers at risk have significant gaps in their track record of publications and their teaching experience. This might be due to the need to escape a situation of violence (e.g. Syria), or firing by their institutions (e.g. signatories of the Academics for Peace petition in Turkey), or if publishing academic articles in their area of expertise was deemed threatening to authorities and put them at risk of censorship or arrest so they instead chose not to publish (e.g. women's rights scholars/political scientists in Iran). Some have not had the opportunity to travel abroad on a regular basis to conferences in their field. Many have not had access to state-of-the-art laboratory facilities that many of their European competitors for fellowships will have had. Many have had to move from one host institution to another on short-term fellowship funding, with intermittent periods of unemployment. Some lack excellent European language skills, and have publications only in their national language. A number have had to deal with censorship of online content in their home countries, denial of publication or research funds for politically sensitive work, or denial of access to online journals containing recent research in areas deemed politically sensitive in their home countries.

The accumulation and intersection of all of the above possible hurdles and disadvantages creates an uneven playing field with their competitors for fellowships the majority of whom will not have encountered comparable challenges in the course of their research careers.

- (b) **Lack of flexible timeline for applications:** One intake per year for MSCA IFs with an approximate six-month gap between the time of application and the decision makes it unlikely that those facing immediate risks will be availing of the mechanism as an emergency opportunity. Even for those who are currently in Europe, the criteria on how long a researcher can or cannot have resided in a specific country in combination with the once a year application deadline, make it difficult for researchers at risk to apply within the deadline. Normally a period

²⁷ Further application statistics available from the Net4Mobility project at: https://www.net4mobilityplus.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/N4M_IF_2019_Stats.pdf

²⁸ European Research Council website, statistics available at: <https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/statistics>

of adjustment is needed from their moment of arrival in Europe to the time at which they are ready to apply.

- (c) **Networks:** For some researchers at risk who do not have strong pre-existing contacts or networks within Europe, it is challenging for them to find a supervisor for their MSCA project with whom to make a joint application. Similar to the above point, forging these new academic connections takes time once a scholar has arrived in Europe, and may not be made in time for the application cycle.
- (d) **Mobility criteria:** The current provisions within the MSCA fellowship application process for researchers with refugee status do not extend to candidates who are outside the refugee process, and who are instead on hosting agreements/temporary visas sponsored by their host institutions. The majority of candidates assisted by SAR, SRF, Cara, PAUSE and PSI are *outside* the refugee process. Furthermore, the mobility requirement itself poses considerable challenges to many researchers at risk who have already endured significant upheaval in moving from their country of origin to a new host country and are beginning to re-establish themselves professionally and personally.

10. Can researchers at risk access existing EU funding for human rights defenders?

A small minority of the researchers at risk assisted by the individual Inspireurope partner organisations have accessed modest EU funding (approximately 10,000 euro per candidate) for human rights defenders (HRDs), primarily through the European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights (EIDHR) emergency grants or ProtectDefenders.eu. Organisations supporting researchers at risk also routinely cooperate with ProtectDefenders.eu, Front Line Defenders, International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), and many other NGOs supporting human rights defenders, artists and writers at risk, referring candidates to each other as appropriate. However, existing EU-funded support for HRDs has not been of widespread use to researchers at risk. For this reason, in 2018 the European Parliament in its Recommendation on the Defence of Academic Freedom in the EU's external action: "calls, in particular, on the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights to include among its priorities the promotion of academic freedom and support for at-risk members of the academic community".²⁹

The two main reasons that existing support for HRDs is not meeting the needs of significant numbers of at-risk scholars include:

- (a) **Eligibility criteria:** Many researchers at risk are and consider themselves HRDs, either due to the content of their academic work or expression, or their extramural advocacy activities. These scholars will usually meet the definition of human rights defenders as currently articulated for EU-funded emergency grants for human rights defenders, which states that the applicant "is facing risks because of his/her human rights work" (ProtectDefenders.eu). However, an overly narrow interpretation of the HRD eligibility to focus only on specific targeting of the content of work will eliminate from consideration many at-risk scholars who experience systemic restrictions (e.g. on travel) or situational violations of human rights. Many scholars are targeted not because of their work, but are targeted based on professional or social status; ethnicity, gender, identity or other characteristic; or as a consequence of broad situational violence or repression.

²⁹ European Parliament recommendation of 29 November 2018 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action (2018/2117 (INI)). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0483_EN.html

In addition to those targeted because the content of their work is deemed politically sensitive (e.g., research on the reliability of census data and transparency of census procedures), a significant number of other scholars are targeted because they undertake international travel to conferences and as a result are accused of espionage, or because they are caught up in a situation of war or conflict. For example, a marine biologist detained upon return from an international conference and accused of sharing state secrets; or a food scientist conscripted to the army in Syria, defecting and fleeing, or a literature professor facing charges of “membership in a terrorist organization,” apparently based on studies at a Gülen-affiliated educational institution in Turkey and possession of US dollar bills. Such scholars are in need of urgent support not only because they are subject to human rights violations, but also because they are representatives of a structurally important community for rights respecting, democratic societies.

- (b) **Scale of existing support:** Support organisations inside and outside the consortium refer a small number of candidates for emergency grants implemented by the EU HRD mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, (estimated at less than 5 candidates referred per year). Such emergency grants are very modest in scale (in the region of 10,000 euro) and can be useful in the provision of living expenses for a few months until such time as a temporary position can be organised for the HRD-scholar at a university, or in order to extend an already-arranged position for 1-2 months. This type of support is not comparable, however, to the fellowship support currently needed in order to place at-risk scholars in temporary positions of safety, which can range from 35,000 euro to 100,000 euro per year depending on where the scholar is temporarily relocated, and the stage they are at in their academic career.

11. Proposed format of an EU-funded fellowship scheme for researchers at risk

Summary: The following is a proposed preliminary outline of a new European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk, based on the experience of consortium partners implementing similar schemes and/or arranging positions in Europe for researchers at risk. Inspireurope partners propose a fellowship programme with three tracks:

Track 1: Urgent placements for researchers at risk (outside the refugee process)

Track 2: Refugee researchers and follow-up placements for at-risk candidates outside refugee process

Track 3: Encouraging the establishment of national fellowship programmes

All proposed fellowship tracks include direct support for researchers at risk and measures for their integration within the host institution and host country.

Preparatory phase: A preparatory phase (via a project grant or tender) would be necessary in order to develop a **recruitment, vetting, evaluation and placement process**, and to implement a pilot phase fellowship programme. Such a process could be established by an external consortium, for example, and take the form of a virtual inter-institutional team, including representatives from organisations and higher education institutions experienced in supporting and hosting significant numbers of researchers at risk, and an advisory or steering committee composed of representatives from the relevant European Commission services and executive agencies.

Three important procedures to be developed and established during such a preparatory phase would include:

1. Agree on process and organisational roles for **assessing risks** faced by candidates who are outside the refugee process (organisations inside and outside the Inspireurope consortium have significant experience in undertaking such risk assessments);
2. Agree on process for **awarding a fellowship** that is for a particular researcher, but paying the grant out to a host institution, *without* requiring the candidate to have identified the host institution at the time of application (there are existing models from NGOs supporting researchers at risk to follow for this proposed approach);
3. Agree on process and assign roles for **matching researchers with host institutions** (there is existing experience in this work within organisations supporting researchers at risk)

Track 1: Urgent placements for researchers at risk (candidates outside the refugee process)

(i) Eligibility criteria

Essential:

- PhD holders (or highest degree in their field), and candidates who have initiated PhD studies but whose studies have been interrupted and who are;
- Experiencing threats to their life, liberty, or academic career, or those who are forced or have recently (*within 0-24 months*) been forced to leave their country because of such threats, but are *without* refugee or similar protection status (*see track 2 for scheme for these candidates*), and without citizenship or permanent residency in an EU member state;
- Applicants may apply from the home country, a third country or from an EU/EEA country. Applicants living in an EU/EEA country may be temporary residents or work permit holders in the EU/EEA but may not be in process of applying for asylum;
- Teaching and/or (doctoral) research experience at a research institution, university, college, or other institution of higher learning, or within the non-academic sector;
- Academic accomplishment or promise;

- Candidates can apply with an existing offer from a host institution (with or without co-funding), or with a request for assistance with placement at a suitable host institution;
- Open to candidates seeking to transition from the academic to the non-academic sector;
- Candidates must have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities.

Desirable (but not required):

- Record of published research

(ii) Application deadlines:

For this urgent track, 3 or 4 application deadlines per year recommended.

(iii) Recruitment of candidates:

- Via open call for applications for fellowships
- If possible, also via:
 - Referrals by potential host institutions
 - Referrals by organisations supporting researchers at risk

(iv) Scale: 15 fully-funded positions per year, plus 5 co-funded positions (with non-resident/remote option for up to 10 out of the 15 positions, for candidates to pursue their fellowship outside the country of the host institution, if they are facing travel restrictions, or where travel would pose additional hardship on a candidate and family). Positions could be co-funded by host institutions, member states, support organisations or other third-party funders.

(v) Costs: A proposed budget, including estimates for track 1 costs is attached. Each fellowship amount listed includes costs for the host institution and the researcher. Since salaries can range from 35K to 100K depending on the host country and experience level of the researcher, the attached budget provides an average amount of 63,000 euro to the researcher and 27,000 to the institutional host (for full-funded positions). Costs for a number of co-funded positions are also provided in the attached. Amounts will differ by country and would be determined based on host country/institution researcher salary scales, employer's costs of host institution, and level of experience of the individual researcher (doctoral candidates through to full professors). Support for each fellow to include relocation allowance, health insurance, school/daycare contributions, language classes, and conference/career development funds.

(vi) Duration: We propose a fellowship duration of 2 years (on average), renewable for a further 2 years, up to 4 years maximum for this track. Objective will be to buy the researcher time in a safe place, with a stable income to enable them to begin making independent job applications, to complete their PhD, and/or to return home should safety conditions allow.

(vii) Evaluation process: As mentioned above, a recruitment, vetting, evaluation and placement process would need to be established in a preparatory phase/project grant, with staff time dedicated to these activities. This structure/consortium would have responsibility for receiving and evaluating applications and selecting successful applicants. Such a process could be established by an external consortium, for example, and take the form of a virtual inter-institutional team, including representatives from organisations and higher education institutions experienced in supporting and hosting significant numbers of researchers at risk, and an advisory or steering committee composed of representatives from the relevant

European Commission services and executive agencies. A roster of external experts (scholars/researchers) with specific subject area expertise could also provide input. Such subject area experts could be sourced from within the existing general pool of experts for other areas of EU funding, or sourced from within the network of experts of the consortium partners.

- (viii) **Placement & administration:** To simplify fellowship administration processes it is recommended that all funding be disbursed by the consortium/EU fellowship coordinator to the host institution (as is currently the case with Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) fellowships in Germany and PAUSE fellowships in France). As noted above, the process for arranging placements would need to be developed in the preparatory phase/project grant mentioned above. If management of the fellowship scheme is outsourced to an experienced consortium, placements could be identified through a combination of (a) the researcher independently (b) support organisations with expertise in arranging placements for at-risk scholars together with national partners (c) via an open call for hosts.

Track 2: Refugee researchers and follow-up placements for those outside refugee process³⁰

(i) **Eligibility criteria**

Track 2 has two sub-tracks.

- (a) Open to researchers who have **proof of recognised refugee status, asylum status, or similar protection status**, but who are without citizenship in an EU/EEA member state (including current or previous recipients of fellowships/placements for researchers at risk).
OR
- (b) Open to researchers who are **outside the refugee process** and without EU/EEA citizenship, and who are already in temporary positions at European universities (arranged independently or via organisations such as SAR, SRF, Cara, PSI or PAUSE), seeking follow-up positions, and who are experiencing or have experienced threats to their life, liberty, or academic career, or those who are forced or have recently been forced to leave their country because of such threats.

Additional essential criteria:

- PhD holders (or highest degree in their field), and candidates who have initiated PhD studies but whose studies have been interrupted;
- Teaching and/or (doctoral) research experience at a research institution, university, college, other institution of higher learning, or within industry;
- Demonstrate academic accomplishment or promise;
- Candidates can apply with an existing offer from a host institution (with or without co-funding), or with a request for assistance with placement at a suitable host institution;
- Open to candidates seeking to transition from the academic to the non-academic sector;
- Candidates must have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities.

Desirable (but not required):

³⁰ As noted in section 1 above, 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 in Europe or elsewhere, outside their home countries.

- Record of published research
- (ii) **Application deadlines:**
1 to 2 application deadlines per year.
- (iii) **Recruitment:**
- Via open call for applications for fellowships
 - If possible, also via:
 - Referrals by potential host institutions
 - Referrals by organisations organising supporting researchers at risk
- (iv) **Scale:** 15 fully-funded fellowship positions per year, plus 5 co-funded positions per year (with non-resident/remote option for up to 10 out of the 15 positions, for example if candidates are facing travel restrictions, or where travel would pose additional hardship on a candidate and his/her family).
- (v) **Costs:** A proposed budget, including estimates for track 2 costs is attached. Each fellowship amount listed includes costs for the host institution and the researcher. Since salaries can range from 35K to 100K depending on the host country and experience level of the researcher, the attached budget provides an average amount of 63,000 euro to the researcher and 27,000 to the institutional host (for fully-funded positions). Costs for a number of co-funded positions are also provided in the attached. Amounts will differ by country and would be determined based on host country/institution researcher salary scales, employer's costs of host institution, and level of experience of the individual researcher (doctoral candidates through to full professors). Support for each fellow to include relocation allowance, health insurance, school/daycare contributions, language classes, and conference/career development funds.
- (vi) **Duration:** Average of 2 years, with objective of providing increased stability for the researcher to develop their research agenda, networks and employment opportunities, or to continue working until such time as a safe return to the home region becomes possible.
- (vii) **Evaluation process:** As in track 1, a committee comprised of representatives from the above-mentioned inter-institutional team/ consortium could form the evaluation committee for the track 2 fellowship scheme. A roster of external experts (scholars/researchers) with specific subject area expertise could also provide input. Such subject area experts could be sourced from within the existing general pool of experts for other areas of EU funding, or sourced from within the network of experts of the consortium partners. It might be expected that a significant proportion of the track 2 applications would come from researchers who are currently in their first or second placements in Europe organised by either SAR, SRF, Cara, PSI, or PAUSE. Assessment of risk and academic credentials would therefore have been undertaken by one of these organisations in the past, which might accelerate the evaluation process for track 2 candidates. In the preparatory phase mentioned above, it would need to be decided whether a specific number of placements should be reserved for researchers who have recognized refugee status, asylum status, or similar protection status.
- (viii) **Placement & administration:** To simplify fellowship administration processes it is recommended that all funding be disbursed by the consortium/EU fellowship scheme coordinator to the host institution (as is currently the case with Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) fellowships in Germany and PAUSE fellowships in France). If management of the

fellowship scheme is outsourced to an experienced consortium, placements could be identified through a combination of (a) the researcher independently (b) support organisations with expertise in arranging placements for at-risk scholars together with national partners (c) via an open call for hosts.

Track 3: Encouraging the establishment of national fellowship programmes

- (i) **Eligibility criteria:** Open to national R&I agencies, networks, funding bodies, NGOs in EU member states interested in creating fellowship programmes in their countries for researchers at risk (for example, those interested in replicating the existing good practices of national programmes such as the Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) in Germany, or the PAUSE programme in France. Existing programmes could guide and support national R&I agencies and other coordinating bodies in the implementations of new initiatives.)
- (ii) **Scale:** In initial pilot phase, grants for up to 5 countries in pilot phase, 2 to 3 years in duration. Funding to cover 2 to 3 fellowships per country to be implemented by the national coordinator, and associated coordination costs. Additional estimated costs of €100,000 per country per year in pilot phase to encourage start-up of new national support programmes for researchers at risk.
- (iii) **Application deadlines:** 1 to 2 application deadlines per year.
- (iv) **Costs:** A co-funding model could be used to encourage national contributions of funding, and to encourage fundraising from other national public and private sources to establish a longer-term support infrastructure for researchers at risk. The co-fund amount required could be initially low at approx. 10% to 30% to encourage uptake of the scheme from a wide range of countries across Europe, especially in parts of Europe not currently active in this work.