Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk

Version: 1

The European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk

Table of Contents

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk

Version: 1, Date of release: 15/12/2021

1. Introduction

Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research are core principles of the European Union and as such anchored in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU[1]. They are in line with the European Commission's key political priorities (2019-2024)[2], and figure high on the European research and education agendas, as highlighted in the European Research Area and European Education Area Communications (September 2020)[3][4], the Bonn Declaration on Freedom in Scientific Research (October 2020)[5], and the Rome Ministerial Communiqué (November 2020)[6]. Investing in excellent researchers is therefore essential if Europe is to remain globally competitive and innovative, and, at the same time, true to its common values.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)[7] are the European Union's flagship instrument to support the mobility, training and career development of researchers, as well as the establishment of excellent doctoral and post-doctoral programmes.

The MSCA are open to researchers of any nationality and at any stage of their careers, from doctoral candidates to postdoctoral researchers. They encourage international, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation, where topics are chosen freely by the applicants and the main drivers are excellence and innovation.

As such, the MSCA are open to researchers at risk and all MSCA applicants and beneficiaries are encouraged to take measures to facilitate the participation of these researchers in MSCA-funded projects.

The present document has been developed with the help of the Inspireurope project[8], a Europe-wide initiative funded by the MSCA to support researchers at risk. The document provides useful background on researchers at risk, along with recommendations on improving their recruitment.

Although the document targets mainly MSCA beneficiaries, its recommendations go beyond the MSCA, and can be implemented by the higher education community more generally.

---

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012P%2FTXT
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en
[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A628%3AFIN
[4] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625
[5] https://www.bmbf.de/files/10_2_2_Bonn_Declaration_en_final.pdf
[6] http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf
[7] https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/
[8] https://maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope

1.1. Who are researchers at risk?

Researchers at risk include researchers, scholars and scientists at all stages of their careers who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty or research career, and those who are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats.[9]

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 institutions in Europe or elsewhere, outside their home countries.

1.2. Why are researchers at risk?

The global Scholars at Risk Network (SAR)[10] reports that although each individual researcher's situation is unique, clear patterns have emerged, which can be summarized in three broad categories:

(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 academic/researcher. Because of their education, frequent travel and professional standing, scholars are often prominent members of their community. A scholar's identity may contribute to their risk as well, especially for those who are members of a political, ethnic, or religious minority, female, or due to sexual orientation. 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. In recent years many scholars have sought refuge abroad because conflict in their home country has made normal academic work impossible. The effects of conflict may include the physical destruction of university buildings, unreliable supplies of electricity and water, the breakdown of local internet provision, the risk of imminent conscription for male scholars, and a rise in general criminality, including kidnapping for ransom, with academics being seen as relatively well-paid and therefore as attractive targets.[11]

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 or research communities.

---

[9] Definition provided by the Inspireurope project on the basis of definitions used by the organisations within the consortium providing direct assistance to researchers at risk.
[10] https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/
[11] Excerpts 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

2. Recommended Practices

MSCA applicants and beneficiaries are encouraged to consider the following measures to widen access for researchers at risk to their projects. The proposed measures relate to the dissemination, recruitment and selection of researchers, and career guidance and training of recruited researchers. All measures are recommendations and should therefore be implemented on a "best effort" basis. They are not part of the beneficiaries' contractual obligations and should not compromise the nature of the MSCA programme, where the main drivers are excellence and innovation.

2.1. Dissemination

Communicate open calls: Institutions, in particular those setting up programmes under MSCA Doctoral Networks and MSCA COFUND, could inform Scholars at Risk Europe (SAR) about upcoming calls for the recruitment of researchers. SAR will ensure wide dissemination of open calls to researchers at risk, working through its partner organisations[12], networks, mailing lists and social media channels. Please contact sareurope@mu.ie with relevant information. Open calls on the EURAXESS portal[13] will also be regularly monitored.

Explicit mention of researchers at risk in communication: If allowed by their institutional policy, institutions are encouraged to include the following language on their website and in social media communications when announcing recruitment calls: 'Researchers at risk are encouraged to apply', as well as the definition of researchers at risk: 'Researchers at risk include researchers, scholars and scientists at all stages of their careers who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty or research career, and those who are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats.'

2.2. Application, selection and recruitment

Dedicated webpage with information for researchers at risk: Institutions are encouraged to provide a dedicated section/ page on their website outlining any measures taken to support researchers at risk in applying for positions. Examples of such measures are provided below.

Tailored advice and guidance: Institutions are encouraged to dedicate a contact point who can provide 1 to 1 advice and guidance to researchers at risk interested in applying for an advertised position or fellowship. Recognising that some researchers at risk may not have pre-existing networks or contacts in the respective host country, institutions are encouraged to provide information on potential supervisors, and connections/introductions where possible.

Take into consideration the specific situation of researchers at risk: Institutions are encouraged to take into consideration the specific situation of researchers at risk during the selection process. Independent experts could be invited to participate in selection committees, or to brief the selection committee in advance of its evaluation meetings on issues to be aware of when assessing the track record of researchers at risk, such as explaining gaps in one's career related to risk. For recommendations of suitable experts on this topic by country, please contact Scholars at Risk Europe.

Be sensitive to security concerns: Personal security is a major concern for many researchers at risk. Even if researchers have been out of their home country for some time they may still have plans to return. Inappropriate disclosures risk impeding such plans.

---

[12] https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope/partners
[13] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs

Some researchers may have concerns about family or colleagues still in the home country. It is important therefore that the researcher's confidentiality be protected at all times during the evaluation and selection process.[14]

2.3. Pre-arrival and post-arrival measures

Consult existing resources & organisations: Organisations dedicated to supporting researchers at risk provide a wealth of information and advice on hosting at-risk scholars. See for example, the Erasmus+ funded Academic Refuge project's *How to Host Curriculum*[15] which shares best practices for arrival planning, integration and transition, with considerations to health, security, immigration, family, housing, orientation, and related preparations. A further list of resources on hosting researchers at risk is below.

Designate mentors: Institutions are encouraged, if possible, to designate both an academic mentor and an administrative mentor for a recruited researcher at risk and provide specific training and support for both mentors. An academic mentor can help with the researcher's professional adjustment and academic productivity, facilitate the researcher's participation in workshops, seminars, and other activities in the host department, school, or centre to ensure the researcher feels fully part of the new community. The administrative mentor may verify that the necessary visa and work authorisations have been issued, that travel has been arranged, and that the researcher will have housing on arrival.

Career development: Institutions wishing to do more could provide a modest career development fund for researchers at risk to include any additional language classes needed, career development and training opportunities, and courses that develop scientific and transferrable skills that add to the future career prospects for the researcher at risk. Costs for training and networking activities that contribute directly to the researchers' career development (e.g. language courses) are eligible costs under the MSCA Research, Training and Networking contribution.

3. Examples of Good Practices

Dedicated webpages: These MSCA-funded projects have dedicated webpages with information for researchers at risk. Even though some of these projects have already finished, the information they have developed can be considered useful:

- EDGE Fellowships: https://edge-research.eu/fellowships/researchers-at-risk/
- ELITE-S Fellowships: https://elite-fellowship.eu/about/researchers-at-risk/
- ALEC programme: https://alecs.lero.ie/researchers-at-risk/

Tailored support: The EDGE programme provided tailored support for researchers at risk during the application process and during the fellowship in Ireland. Such support is outlined

---

[14] Further advice on security concerns is provided in Scholars at Risk's *How to Host*, *A Handbook for Higher Education Partners*, available at: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAR-How-to-Host-Handbook.pdf.

[15] https://www.uio.no/english/about/global/globally-engaged/academic-refuge/academic-refuge-curriculum_how-to-host_2019.pdf The Academic Refuge project was an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership that aimed to improve the capacity of European universities to assist refugees and threatened academics on campus and to promote understanding and respect for higher education values. Partners include the University of Oslo, the UNICA network, the University of Ljubljana, and Scholars at Risk. The European University Association (EUA), the European Association of International Education (EAIE), Al-Fanar Media, and University World News were associate partners on the project.

on the EDGE website, and researchers at risk are invited to contact a designated contact point.

Encouraging applications from researchers at risk: The MSCA COFUND CareerFitPlus[16] included the line 'Researchers at risk are encouraged to apply' in the dissemination of its 2020 recruitment call.

Webinars for researchers at risk: CareerFitPlus organised a dedicated webinar for researchers at risk in September 2020, in partnership with the Inspireurope project. Recording available here: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope/webinars

Awareness-raising for MSCA National Contact Points: Net4Mobility+[17] included a presentation on researchers at risk by the Inspireurope project at its project meeting in January 2021. The meeting included 30 MSCA National Contact Points (NCP). Inspireurope's participation in the meeting contributed to an increased understanding by the NCPs of challenges facing researchers at risk, as well as possible measures to facilitate the participation of researchers at risk in MSCA-funded projects.

4. Further Information

Scholars at Risk and Inspireurope: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope

Email: sareurope@mu.ie

For detailed advice and best practices for hosting at-risk scholars/researchers, see:

- How to Host, Scholars at Risk, 2019
- Pathways to Practice, A Practitioner's Tool, Welcoming at risk scholars to campus, Marit Egner & Karolina Catoni, 2017
- Trainings on Mentoring Refugee Researchers, EU-funded BRiDGE project
- How to Host Training Curriculum, developed by the Academic Refuge Project A resource for universities welcoming at-risk and refugee scholars to campus, Produced by the 'Academic Refuge' Project, An Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership
- Livret d'accueil, A l'attention des établissements, Programme national d'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil
- Best practices for host institutions in Germany, Philipp Schwartz Initiative, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
- Inspireurope webinars and resources for host institutions

---

[16] https://www.horizon2020.ie/career-fit-plus/
[17] http://www.net4mobilityplus.eu/