

Call to Europe to champion academic freedom and protect academics at risk

On 5th May 2025 in Paris, at the launch of a new *Choose Europe for Science* initiative, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated *“as threats rise across the world, Europe will not compromise on its principles. Europe must remain the home of academic and scientific freedom”*.

We, a coalition of leading European consortia, initiatives and organisations dedicated to the protection of researchers at risk and the promotion of academic freedom and autonomy, applaud this sentiment. We gathered in Paris on 7th May for the Inspireurope+ Forum to highlight the urgent need for Europe to strengthen its commitment to academic freedom and the protection of researchers at risk.

Academic freedom and autonomy are fundamental rights. They are essential for research, education, and democratic societies, however, the numbers of academics who do not enjoy these freedoms has been growing. Threats to higher education and academic freedom are increasing globally.

Over the past years, our organisations have worked with national fellowship schemes and advocated for the development of a European scheme. We have provided direct assistance to researchers at risk from around the world, thus strengthening European higher education and research. We have provided policy recommendations and practical solutions, pointing the way to ensure stronger, enduring protection for academic freedom in Europe and beyond.

This has had tangible outcomes which demonstrate the need for such measures, as well as the opportunities and the impact that they create, for the individual researcher at risk, for the hosting institution, and for national and European research and education. In 2022, our work provided the model for the European Commission to respond within a few months to the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the establishment of the MSCA4Ukraine programme. Two years later, it delivered the building blocks for the pilot SAFE fellowship programme, which the European Commission established on request of the European Parliament as a preparatory measure, and which awards fellowships recognising research excellence to academics at risk from all parts of the world.

European collaboration and coordination has been key in all of this. For six years this has been driven by the MSCA supported Inspireurope+ consortium, bringing together key actors in the promotion of academic freedom and protection of at-risk researchers. In the same period of time, several schemes and organisations that support academics at risk have been emerging. This essential collaboration demonstrates Europe's capacity for rapid and impactful action.

We therefore urge the European Commission and EU Member States to prioritize the continuation and extension of these actions, including comprehensive support for international researchers and students facing danger and displacement, in line with the 2022 Marseille Declaration on international cooperation in research and innovation. At this moment when threats to higher education and academic freedom are growing globally, Europe must champion academic freedom.

We therefore recommend

- **Prioritise academic freedom and support for researchers at risk under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework and the European Research Area Act, as this would set a clear sign, in Europe, and internationally.** This support should be built on the [Inspireurope Recommendations](#).
- Establish a permanent European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk which is long-term and country agnostic. This can build on the Inspireurope+ Recommendations as well as on the concrete experience of MSCA4Ukraine and SAFE, and the work of the European Commission's MSCA Unit, which have generated strong evidence for the feasibility, positive impacts and European added value of fellowship programmes and European coordination of support for at-risk researchers.
- Consider whether such a measure could be integrated in, or related to, *Choose Europe for Science*, as this puts a strong emphasis on academic freedom.

As President Emmanuel Macron stated at the launch of *Choose Europe For Science*, “*Let us cherish the free open science that is at the heart of our societies*”. We agree.

Inspireurope+ and our other consortia, initiatives, networks and partners stand ready to support and advise the European Commission and EU Member States in effectively designing and implementing these fundamental measures.

Signatories:

Inspireurope+
MSCA4Ukraine
SAFE

Scholars at Risk Europe
PAUSE
Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung
Campus France
Cara
DAAD
European University Association
UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union
University of Gothenburg

Scholars at Risk (SAR) Network
ACAF – Africa Coalition for Academic Freedom
CAFA – Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas
Magna Carta Observatory
SAIH - Studentenes og Akademikernes Internasjonale Hjelpesfond
Scholars at Risk Flanders Section
Scholars at Risk Germany Section
Scholars at Risk Greece Section
Scholars at Risk Ireland Section

Scholars at Risk Slovakia Section
 Scholars at Risk Sweden Section
 Scholars at Risk Switzerland Section
 Scholars at Risk Wallonia-Brussels Section
 SEACAF – Southeast Asia Coalition for Academic Freedom
 The Dutch refugee student foundation UAF
 UNICA



For further information regarding the statement, including media requests, please contact: Inspireurope+, inspireurope@mu.ie or Frank Geary, Director, Scholars at Risk Europe, frank.geary@mu.ie. For general queries regarding Inspireurope+ or any of the statement signatories, please contact inspireurope@mu.ie.