

The Situation of At-risk and Displaced
Artists and Culture Professionals

ON
THE
MOVE

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Case Studies

CHAPTER 10

**Case Study:
The EU Pilot
Fellowship Scheme
SAFE for At-risk
Researchers**



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Czech Cultural Institute

On the Move is the international information network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 86 members from 32 countries. Since 2002, On the Move provides regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and advocates for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multi-annual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

On the Move regularly commissions researchers to investigate different themes closely related to the network's activities and the work carried out by its members. Reflecting on transversal concerns and key areas of artistic and cultural mobility, the network tries to establish a clearer picture of the current movements and trends while formulating policy recommendations.

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CHAPTER 10

Case Study: The EU Pilot Fellowship Scheme SAFE for At-risk Researchers

by **Martina Hájková**

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Established in September 2024, this initiative operates across the Member States of the European Union with support from the European Commission’s Research Executive Agency (REA), under the Programme for Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPA). The project, set to run until September 2027, is implemented by a consortium led by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Campus France, PAUSE—hosted by the Collège de France—and UNIMED, the Mediterranean Universities Union. The consortium is further strengthened by eight associated partners, including the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research (DZS), the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), the European University Association (EUA), the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), the Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education (Nuffic), and Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. With a total budget of 12 million euros, the project employs a cascade funding mechanism to achieve its ambitious objectives¹.

Background

Support in Europe for researchers at risk is fragmented and limited to a handful of countries and organisations providing sustained support for researchers at risk. Recent years have seen a sudden inflows of at-risk scholars (e.g. from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine), demonstrating a clear need and challenge to respond². On 20 March 2023, at the initiative of the European Parliament, the European Commission launched a [call for applications](#) to set up a programme of European fellowships for researchers at risk. This call for projects is part of the Commission’s pilot projects and preparatory actions in the fields of sport, culture, research and innovation.

The PAUSE programme, which has supported at-risk scientists for more than seven years, joined forces with French and European partners in a consortium to answer the call. The [Supporting At-risk researchers with Fellowships in Europe](#) (SAFE), submitted to the European

Commission in September 2023, was selected to implement this pilot scheme for a period of three years, from September 2024 to September 2027.

SAFE is run by the aforementioned consortium and is fully funded by the Research Executive Agency (REA) as a pilot project to develop and test a suitable structure to select and fund researchers (PhD-doctoral students and/or Post-Doctorate researchers) at risk at EU higher education and research institutions.

The members of the consortium divide the supervision of the project activities among themselves: overall project coordination by DAAD, communication and networking activities by Campus France, provision of matchmaking services by UNIMED, design and implementation of selection mechanism by DAAD, fellowship management by Campus France, and capitalisation by PAUSE.

¹ Contacts for enquiries on the SAFE project: info.safe@daad.de (information on the call for applications), info.safe@uni-med.net (information on the matchmaking service), safe.pause@college-de-france.fr (information on policy recommendations), safe@campusfrance.org (other questions).

² Horizon 2020 funded several European-level projects supporting researchers at risk under the science4refugees framework. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) has since 2019 supported organisations working with researchers at risk through the InspireEurope and InspireEurope+ projects (these projects could not provide fellowships). The most recent support scheme under MSCA for researchers at risk is the MSCA4Ukraine fellowship scheme.

Objectives and goals

The main objective of the project is to facilitate connection between researchers at risk from non-EU countries and research institutions from the EU Member States and to enable collaboration by covering costs and providing a matchmaking service.

The pilot is a fellowship scheme which involves one open call for researchers that in 2025 awarded 56 fully funded fellowships (for a minimum of 12 months and up to 24 months) for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers of any non-EU nationality to work at a research institution in the EU as well as some compensation for the hosting institutions. Matchmaking was an optional service in this open call phase that helped to match researchers at risk with potential host institutions in the EU with the aim of developing a joint

proposal. The hosting institutions are obliged to provide support (legal, housing, and more) to their selected researchers.

The aim of the call itself was to contribute to the EU priorities under the European Research Area (ERA) on fundamental values and academic freedom, notably but not restricted to the work under the ERA Policy Agenda Action 6 on academic freedom.

Also, the pilot aims to contribute to the skills development and career enhancement of the supported individual researchers, such as through new transferable skills and competences, new knowledge, enhanced networking and communication capacities, and long-lasting collaborative links with EU counterparts.

Funding and resources

This project is funded by a grant from Research Executive Agency (REA) under a pilot grant scheme. The call was open for submissions from 28 June 2023, with the deadline to apply on 7 September 2023. This action is part of the 2023 [**Annual Work Programme for the Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions in the area of Sport, Culture, Research and Innovation.**](#)

Funds are distributed between the selected fellow researchers and host institutions. Fellowship value for Doctoral and/or PhD students is 3,400 EUR gross monthly salary with a 600 EUR monthly mobility allowance, while for postdoctoral researchers it provides 5,080 EUR gross monthly salary with a 600 EUR monthly mobility allowance. If applicable there is a fixed family allowance of 660 EUR per month and there is a possibility to

get an allowance for special needs³. There is also financial support for the hosting institutions in the form of a monthly contribution of 1,000 EUR to research training and networking and a one-time contribution of 650 EUR for management and indirect costs.

Granted funds are distributed exclusively by the host institutions, which had to sign fellowship contracts with Campus France. These contracts set the fellowship implementation procedures, reporting obligations and the timeline, and amounts of the payments to be made by Campus France to the host institution based on the researcher profile. The salary allowances are transferred to the host institutions as a gross amount, including both employer and employee contributions and taxes. The mobility and family

³ The special needs allowance contributes to the additional costs for the acquisition of special items and services for researchers with disabilities, whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are certified by a competent national authority, and are of such nature that their participation in the action may not be possible without adequate support (e.g. assistance by third persons, adaptation of work environment, additional travel/transportation costs). These special needs items or services must not have been funded from another source (e.g. social security or health insurance).

allowances can be paid to the researchers separately or as part of the salary as a living allowance (subject to deductions), depending on national and host institution's rules. The special needs allowance is paid to the host institution as an actual cost upon receipt of supporting documents. There is no country correction coefficient within the SAFE project, i.e. fellowships' amounts are the same regardless of the EU country in which the host institution is based.

Associated partners helped especially with spreading awareness of the project. On the project website there is useful information and links to other supporting schemes and/or organisations for researchers and scholars at risk, for example [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions \(MSCA\)](#), [EURAXESS—Science4refugees](#), [Scholars at Risk](#) and [others](#).

Target groups and conditions

The following section refers to the target group and conditions of the SAFE Call for applications, launched on 18 November 2024 and closed on 20 January 2025. A total of 56 applicants were selected to commence their fellowship.

Eligibility criteria

There are two main target groups for the beneficiaries of the fellowships: 'Track 1' is for at-risk researchers currently outside the EU (with no refugee/protection status)⁴ and 'Track 2' is for at-risk researchers already within the EU (with refugee/protection/temporary status).

Eligibility criteria of the November 2024 call stipulated that the candidates:

- A) must be Doctoral/PhD candidates or Postdoctoral researchers,
- B) must have the necessary language skills to successfully conduct their research project,
- C) must not hold EU citizenship and
- D) must face or have faced qualifying risks.

Also, an ethics checklist⁵ had to be submitted with the application.

Criteria A stated that Postdoctoral researchers who have successfully defended their PhD/doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the PhD/doctoral degree were also considered eligible to apply⁶. If the applicant had started PhD/doctoral studies abroad but had to interrupt them or if they were enrolled in a PhD/doctoral programme at the time of the application they could still apply but they had to be able to provide evidence that they had started a PhD/doctoral research project.

Criteria B stated that researchers must have the language skills necessary to successfully conduct their research activities at the potential host institution. It was the responsibility of the host institution to check that a candidate has the necessary language skills. Language certificates were not required for an application, but it was up to the host institution to decide whether to request official certificates from their candidate.

Criteria C stated that in general, researchers with recognised refugee status in the EU may be permitted to conduct their research projects only at host institutions located in the EU Member State where they were granted that status. When

⁴ Preparing all the necessary documents in three months was a challenge for many. In the case of a regularly recurring call, applicants would already know what to prepare for. However, there will still be the problem of destroyed documents and non-functioning offices in conflict-affected zones.

⁵ A form is provided and the EU has published guidance: ['How to complete your ethics self-assessment'](#).

⁶ The successful defence must be unconditional (no further requirements/corrections that need to be addressed) and take place before the call deadline.

applying, host organisations had to ensure that the researcher's residence status in the EU allows them to conduct the proposed project at their institution. The status of a recipient of international protection (i.e. refugee/subsidiary protection) had to have been granted by the time of application.

Criteria D stated that researchers at risk within the scope of the SAFE project included those who face threats to their life, personal freedom, or research career, or who have been forced to flee because of such threats. Risk may arise from factors such as: general circumstances (e.g. armed conflict, civil unrest, low level of academic freedom); researcher's academic work, actions and/or associations (e.g. due to their field of research, or due to their involvement in political, civic, or social activities grounded in liberal and democratic principles, or due to their associations with similarly threatened individuals or groups); researcher's personal identity (e.g. their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious beliefs).

As part of the application process, researchers were required to provide their potential host institution with detailed information about their risk situation, including a personal testimony supported by relevant documentation. The host institution would then outline the candidate's risk circumstances in the risk description form, a mandatory component of the application. While evidence of risk was not compulsory, applicants had the option to submit supporting documentation, such as dismissal notices, court summonses, imprisonment records, credible written threats, records of censorship attempts, social media posts related to personal activism, documents detailing specific incidents, statements from humanitarian organisations, witness testimonies, reports or news articles from reputable sources on relevant conflicts, or official evacuation orders. For researchers already granted official international protection status, this was also recognised as objective evidence of their risk situation.

Eligible host institutions included academic or non-academic higher education and research organisations based in an EU Member State. An academic organisation was defined as a public or private higher education establishment awarding academic degrees, or a public or private non-profit research organisation whose primary objective is to conduct research or technological development. A non-academic organisation referred to any socio-economic entity outside the academic sector.

Both researchers and host institutions could access an eligibility and risk questionnaire on the project website as a preparatory tool before submitting an application⁷. Applications had to be submitted by the host institution on behalf of the researcher, with only one application permitted per institution for a single researcher. Each application required the signature of the institution's head. It should be noted that applications were to be submitted at the university level, rather than by individual institutes or departments.

Profiles of researchers supported

The programme is open to all fields of research and innovation, with the requirement that any employment contract funded by a SAFE fellowship must be on a full-time basis. While there is no specific demographic focus, the programme aimed to achieve a gender-balanced selection process of the call for researchers.

In the original EU call for proposals, applying organisations were strongly encouraged to implement a gender equality plan or incorporate gender-related considerations into their institutional practices. This included fostering gender balance in leadership and decision-making roles, as well as in recruitment and career progression. Organisations were also advised to consider the gender dimension when selecting researchers for the programme.

During the application process, researchers who wanted to receive an additional allowance to

⁷ At the time of publishing the questionnaire was no longer available online.

support family needs were required to indicate whether family members would accompany them. This matter was also addressed in the hosting plan.

Results of the 2025 open call

The [results of the SAFE Call for applications](#), launched on 18 November 2024 and closed on 20 January, have been published on the website of the SAFE project. During this pilot project out of 359 applicants, a total of 56 fellows from 15 countries are being supported to continue their work in 13 EU Member States. The top host countries of the selected researchers are Germany, France and Italy⁸.

A total of 44 of the selected fellows are postdoctoral researchers while 12 are doctoral candidates. There are 32 female researchers, 23 male researchers and 1 is a non-binary researcher.

Of the awarded fellows, 27 researchers at risk applied from outside the EU (Track 1) while 29 fellowships were awarded to researchers who are already in the EU (Track 2).

The main disciplines of the selected fellows are law, economics and social science, language and cultural studies, mathematics and natural sciences, and engineering.

Application and selection process of the 2024 call for researchers

Recruitment process

The project's website, description, application forms, and related materials are currently available exclusively in English. Detailed guidance on the required application documents was provided in the Terms of Reference for Applicants, and checklists were made available to assist candidates throughout the process. According to online sources, the project has been promoted through the consortium members and their partners, as well as via the Research Executive Agency's (REA) communication channels. Those interested in receiving updates can subscribe to a dedicated newsletter for the latest information.

Application procedure

The entire application process, along with all guidelines and supporting documents, was

conducted exclusively in English. As previously noted, researchers were unable to apply for the grant independently; instead, applications could only be submitted by the host institution on behalf of their proposed collaboration, using an online form.

Researchers interested in participating in the scheme had two options: they could either contact potential host institutions directly or utilise the matchmaking service provided. This service was specifically designed to connect researchers and host institutions that had not yet identified a partner for their application. To access the matchmaking service, both researchers and host institutions were required to complete an online profile⁹. Researchers faced an additional step—passing an eligibility check—and once this was cleared, they could proceed to complete their profile and begin the matching process.

⁸ Other countries are Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Poland, and Spain.

⁹ Researchers had to fill in contact information, education level, language skills, risk statement, CV, publications, research abstracts, and placement preferences in their expression of interest. Host institutions had to fill in information on their institution, research areas available, language requirements for hosting, and other requirements.

During this phase, the submitted data underwent cleaning and validation. Matches were then generated based on criteria such as academic field, research level, preferred host country, language requirements, and any additional, manually specified criteria. Host institutions could access the matchmaking platform to review anonymised profiles of potential candidates and request further information if needed. If a host institution identifies a suitable candidate, they could preselect the researcher and conduct an online interview. Upon a successful match, the two parties would then collaborate as partners to finalise and submit their joint application.

To ensure the institution was on board as a whole and to ensure that there was only one application per institution, the head of the host institution had to endorse the application, sign the hosting plan and provide the contact details. The person responsible for the application on behalf of the institution had to be identified and employed by the institution, because that person was the main contact point during the selection process.

For the **application**, documents had to be submitted according to the selection criteria (see next section) and all relevant forms had to be included. The following documents were required for applying and can be divided into categories:

A) General documents: online application, data processing consent form (F), copy of ID or passport (including the accompanying family), copy of current residence permit (if applicable);

B) Documents relating to the ‘Excellence’ evaluation criterion: motivation letter, curriculum vitae, list of publications (for PhD applicants this was optional), selection of up to three of the most important publications (for Ph.D. applicants this was optional), external assessment letter (F, sent separately), academic certificates;

C) Documents relating to the ‘Implementation’ evaluation criterion: detailed statement by

the academic supervisor/mentor at the host institution, research proposal, time plan, detailed hosting plan (F), ethics self-assessment form (F);

D) Documents relating to the ‘Impact’ evaluation criterion: risk description form (F), supporting evidence (if available).

The academic supervisor or mentor was responsible for conducting an interview with the candidate before the application was submitted. They were required to provide a confidential statement assessing the candidate’s academic profile and research project as part of the application. Additionally, they had to assist the researcher in completing the ethics self-assessment, working alongside the institution’s designated ethics contact (whose details were included in the application). In the event of a successful application, the supervisor or mentor would serve as the primary point of support throughout the research project, ensuring the candidate had access to the necessary workspace.

A critical component of the application process was the external assessment letter, which had to be written by a professor in the same academic field as the proposed research project¹⁰. This professor had to be affiliated with an academic or non-academic research institution within the EU. The hosting plan provided a detailed overview of the proposed administrative, academic, personal, and social support measures, as well as a post-fellowship strategy.

Each SAFE project application was required to comply with national and EU ethics regulations for research, while also aligning with EU policy priorities, including environmental, social, security, and industrial objectives.

Selection criteria

The selection criteria for the programme were based on four key areas: general eligibility, excellence, implementation, and impact. Following

¹⁰ This letter had to come from a different institution, and it could not be the candidate-researcher’s supervisor/mentor.

the application deadline, the first step involved an eligibility check, which assessed the completeness of each application and verified compliance with the general eligibility requirements. Applications that successfully passed this initial stage proceeded to step two, which was a preliminary assessment. This step was only implemented if the ratio of applications to available fellowships exceeds 2:1 and it was conducted based on the established selection criteria.

In the end, 359 applicants competed for up to 60 fellowships, so the preliminary assessment was applied. DAAD prepared an initial ranking of all applications, and the top 120 applications were then forwarded to external reviewers for further evaluation.

Step three involved an external evaluation based on the selection criteria. Each application was independently assessed by two academic experts and one regional expert.

Step four was the final selection, carried out by an expert selection committee. The committee's decision-making process was informed by the external evaluations. The committee comprises members with collective expertise in science, academia, research management, policy, risk assessment, and regional knowledge, and included ethics advisers. Additionally, the SAFE Coordinating Committee—consisting of senior representatives from the implementing partners—participated in the final selection meeting.

In step five, the results were published. Institutions with selected applicants were given two weeks to accept the funding offer; failure to respond within this period resulted in the withdrawal of the offer. Institutions on the reserve list also had two weeks to confirm their continued interest. Once accepted, selected institutions received a fellowship agreement from Campus France, outlining the financial arrangements,

payment schedules, and reporting obligations. The agreement included annexes detailing the applicable rules and regulations¹¹.

In step three of the evaluation process, reviewers documented their assessments using a structured evaluation form. This form included both a written evaluation and a numerical score assigned to the specific subcriteria of excellence, implementation, and impact. Reviewers were also required to identify any elements within the application that might raise concerns and necessitate further examination.

Each application could achieve a maximum score of 100 points. If the assessments by the two academic reviewers differed by more than 15 points in total or by more than 5 points for any individual criterion—specifically for criterion 1 (Excellence) and criterion 2 (Implementation)—a third external expert was consulted to provide an additional review. The final score for these criteria was determined by calculating the mean of the two closest assessments.¹²

To advance in the selection process, applications were required to meet a minimum threshold: at least 60% of the maximum points for each criterion and an overall score of at least 60 points. Applications that failed to meet these benchmarks were excluded from further consideration.

The risk situation of the researchers, evaluated under the Impact criterion, was assessed by regional experts. Their evaluation considered several key aspects: the particular reasons why the researcher was at risk, the extent and nature of the threats and consequences they had faced, and the severity of their situation. Severity was further divided into two tracks: Track 1 examined whether the candidate remained in the country where the risk existed or had managed to flee, while Track 2 assessed how long the candidate had been in the EU, their residency status, and the

11 For example, the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, Open Science Statement, EU Visibility Guidelines, as well as templates for narrative and financial reporting.

12 In cases where three assessments were conducted, the final score was calculated using the mean of the two closest assessments, excluding the third, or 'outlier', assessment to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all applications.

validity period of that status. The availability of supporting evidence was also taken into account.

The quality of the hosting plan was another critical aspect of the evaluation, focusing on the level of support the host institution pledged to provide. This includes an assessment of working conditions and administrative support, such as assistance with visas, accommodation, family services, mental health, and language support. Academic support is also evaluated, encompassing supervision, peer networks, and mentoring programmes. Additionally, the post-fellowship plan is scrutinised for its provisions regarding career development opportunities, financial support, and concrete arrangements for securing academic or non-academic opportunities following the fellowship. The host institution's commitment to offering post-fellowship employment or funding was also considered.

This approach aligns with the findings of the Inspireurope Project's final report, *[Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response](#)*, which underscores the importance of comprehensive support to facilitate a smooth transition for at-risk researchers. Such support combines practical assistance with administrative and visa procedures, trauma counselling, psychological follow-up, language tuition, academic training, and career planning. By incorporating a post-fellowship plan into the selection criteria, the process prioritises applications that demonstrate sustainability and a long-term commitment to the researcher's future.

Transparency and fairness

The evaluation of applications was conducted through an open call for external experts, including both academic and regional specialists. To qualify as an academic reviewer, candidates were required to hold a position as a full-time professor at a higher education institution, a junior or tenure-track professor, or a senior scientist or junior research group leader at a non-university research institution or equivalent organisation. For the evaluation of PhD applicants, even full-time

or part-time academic staff at universities, higher education institutions, research organisations, or similar bodies—provided they hold a doctoral degree and possess a higher academic qualification than the candidate being assessed—were eligible to apply.

Regional experts were expected to meet the same academic criteria or, alternatively, could be recognised specialists working in foundations, ministries, or university and research administration. These experts were required to demonstrate proven regional knowledge and expertise in human rights law frameworks, as well as an understanding of the political, cultural, and socioeconomic dynamics relevant to their area of specialisation.

All reviewers, regardless of their background, were required to have international experience, excellent command of English, and a track record of supervising foreign students and researchers or participating in international cooperation projects.

Academic reviewers focused on conducting a subject-specific assessment of the applications, as well as evaluating the hosting plan proposed by the applicant institution for the researcher. Regional reviewers, with their specialised knowledge of human rights frameworks and political and social dynamics, were responsible for assessing the risk situation of the candidate.

It is important to note that reviewers worked on a voluntary basis, receiving no payment for their evaluations. Evaluators were explicitly committed to conducting the selection process in a non-discriminatory manner. When assessing a candidate's excellence, particular attention was given to factors such as gender, health impairments, care responsibilities, or employment dependencies. Reviewers were required to consider whether any of these circumstances had adversely affected the candidate's academic performance, the duration of their studies, or their ability to participate in extracurricular activities.

To ensure objectivity and adherence to the selection criteria, reviewers were prohibited from assessing applications submitted by their own institutions. If a reviewer discovered that they had been assigned an application from an individual with whom they shared a personal or professional relationship, they were obligated to immediately disclose this conflict to DAAD. The application in question would then be reassigned to another reviewer. By completing the evaluation form, each reviewer formally declared their impartiality.

Additionally, DAAD aimed, where possible, to achieve gender balance in the appointment of reviewers.

Applicants who believed an error had occurred in the evaluation process were entitled to submit a request for redress. This request has to be made within two weeks of receiving the selection results and would be reviewed by the SAFE Coordinating Committee.

Types of support provided

In addition to the direct financial benefits described above, host institutions can provide researchers with additional funding to support the researcher's project and stay, which should have been outlined in the Hosting plan.

As mentioned above the hosting institutions were obliged to provide detailed information on the administrative and practical support measures planned for the researcher at the host institution. The exact scope was not set but the provided measures were evaluated during the application process. Minimum standards were declared in the application, and it was not possible to apply without ensuring the following:

A) Providing assistance to the researcher in obtaining the necessary visas, residence permits, and any required documentation for their research stay offering comprehensive support in all practical matters related to the researcher's travel to, and stay in, the host country, and if necessary, acting as an intermediary between the researcher and the relevant authorities

B) Signing an employment contract with the researcher with full social security coverage and providing the necessary resources and facilities

(such as a laboratory, workplace, or equivalent) for the successful execution of the project, as well as paying the researcher according to the salary scale applicable to the SAFE project and agreeing to offer the candidate any required information and assistance to ensure full compliance with relevant labour laws

C) Allocating part of the institutional contribution for research training and networking to ensure the participation of the researcher and/or representatives of the host institution in events organised within the framework of the SAFE project.

The specific scope of the assistance provided always depended on the specific grant application submitted. This assistance could include: helping with traveling to the host country, navigating official procedures and finding accommodation, as well as access to medical support and mental health support services, language training, and support with the researcher's social integration within the institution. Where applicable, the hosting institution had to outline in the application any family support services that were available to the researcher's family.

Monitoring and evaluation

As outlined in the initial call, the consortium is responsible for establishing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These include defining performance metrics to measure the programme's success, implementing feedback mechanisms to gather and act on participant input, and conducting impact assessments to evaluate the long-term effects on participants. At present, no interim evaluation has been published, with the consortium expected to propose detailed monitoring and evaluation grids by the conclusion of the pilot phase.

There is no other programme of this scale dedicated to researchers at risk, although there are national schemes helping researchers (led for example by the consortium members), Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), and initiatives of individual organisations. According to the survey conducted

for the Inspireurope Project¹³ (confirmed by researchers, support organisations, and host institutions), the high level of competitiveness of the European research programmes and positions is an obstacle for applying to EU programmes. For instance, 81% of hosts report this competitiveness as a potential obstacle, while in 2019, MSCA individual fellowships had an overall success rate of 14% and the European Research Council (ERC) [Starting Grant](#) for talented early-career scientists consolidated and advanced grants a success rate of 12%. This highlights how difficult it is to win a grant, even for those who have worked their entire research lives within well-resourced, stable institutions in stable countries. In light of this, the SAFE scheme gives a much bigger chance to researchers at risk as it is a fellowship programme dedicated only to them.

Challenges and limitations

In the 2025 application round, host institutions who wanted to cooperate with researchers still outside of the EU had issues with the timeline of the application process. They had only three months to compile all the necessary papers to apply. In conflict zones, administration does not always work very smoothly and also some documents might have been destroyed or lost.

SAFE is a pilot project, so the main limitation is that it is a 'one time only' programme. From the author's point of view, to be able to fund 56 fellowships guaranteeing full-time employment for up to 24 months is quite generous, but it needs to be a recurring call to be able to cover the demand for this type of funding.

The selection process, which spanned approximately four months, involved a demanding application procedure and time-consuming bureaucratic requirements for all parties involved. However, limiting the number of applications per institution and encouraging thorough internal preparation helped ensure that participating academic and research institutions were fully committed and well-equipped to provide researchers with the necessary assistance and support.

It is too early to assess whether the support scheme achieves what it states in its objectives. The implementation of the respective fellowships just started so it would be necessary to review the evaluation in the later stage of the project and after its finalisation.

¹³ European University Association (EUA), Stoeber, H., Gaebel, M. and Morrisroe, A., [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response](#), Inspireurope – Initiative to Support, Promote and Integrate Researchers at Risk in Europe, 2020.

Replicating the European pilot action for at-risk artists and culture professionals

A similar pilot action for artists at risk is very much needed and the European Call¹⁴ for a Preparatory Action-European Fellowship Scheme for Researchers at Risk action could be replicated. The report *Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response*¹⁵ highlights that the most pressing issues for researchers at risk when relocating is career guidance for post placement employment (43%), better funding or salary conditions (14%) and the need for legal support (12%). For the host institutions it is the need for the additional funding to host researchers at risk (83%), support at national or European policy levels (60%), and support from higher education institutions' leadership (50%).

By comparison, evaluating an academic researcher's CV, publications, or credentials may be more straightforward than assessing the quality of an artist's career trajectory, which can include varied forms of education—if any—and notions of 'professionalism'. In this programme, researchers were required to maintain active affiliation with academic or research institutions, a condition that significantly simplified the verification of their credentials¹⁶. Host institutions also served as essential guarantors of the researchers' academic standards.

The host institutions in the SAFE programme are required to guarantee that each researcher meets the eligibility criteria, possesses sufficient language skills, and has undergone an interview. They also have to confirm that the researcher does not hold EU citizenship (for example, in cases of dual nationality), and that all submitted documents and information has been thoroughly

reviewed. Additionally, the host institution has to ensure that the researcher possesses—or would be assisted in obtaining—all necessary travel documents for entry into the host country in time for the fellowship's start date. Alternatively, the host institution needs to confirm, to the best of its knowledge, that the researcher's residence status in the EU permits them to undertake the proposed project at the specified time, in full compliance with both EU and national residence laws. Finally, they need to attest that the candidate is not currently undergoing refugee proceedings and that no known factors would disqualify them from receiving the fellowship.

Only institutions—rather than individuals—may submit applications. This approach enhances the programme's effectiveness within academic and research sectors, where institutions typically possess robust bureaucratic structures capable of providing researchers with the necessary administrative and logistical support. Arts and cultural organisations often lack the same operational capacities as universities and research institutes. Unlike their academic counterparts, many of these organisations do not have dedicated Human Resources departments or the administrative infrastructure required to facilitate the arrival, relocation, and integration of at-risk third-country nationals and their families. The small-scale and fragmented nature of the CCI sector, as well as the precarity of not-for-profit operators, suggests that joint approaches or consortium-based operational models may be necessary to ensure these organisations can effectively implement similar initiatives.

14 EU Funding & Tenders Portal, Call [PPPA-RI-2023-FELLOWSHIPS-RR](#).

15 European University Association (EUA), Stoeber, H., Gaebel, M. and Morrisroe, A., [Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response](#).

16 Artistic research and practice-based research conducted within academic environments are not uniformly recognised or established across all EU Member States. This inconsistency may limit opportunities for eligible artists in the academic world or introduce additional barriers for those who might otherwise qualify for support.

Respected cultural institutions could act as guarantors and curators in the selection process. They could submit applications on behalf of artists, supported by external assessment letters that confirm their excellence, much like the obligations placed on host institutions for researchers. There might be a challenge when trying to define ‘respected’ arts institutions but the evaluators of the applications would be experts in the field, so they would be able to assess the status of individual host institutions¹⁷.

The primary challenge in replicating this programme likely lies in the management of residency permits. The EU and its Member States have been working to streamline these processes in order to attract global research talent. In recent years, tailored visa and residence initiatives have expanded significantly, in order to reduce bureaucratic hurdles, expedite entry procedures, and provide long-term stability for researchers¹⁸. Additionally, the [EURAXESS](#) national information

portal offers country-specific guidance on entry conditions, visa procedures, and support services.

While most at-risk researchers enter Europe through a researcher or scientific visa—typically a long-stay visa based on a ‘hosting agreement’ with a higher education or research institution—no equivalent effort has been made for artists and culture professionals from third countries¹⁹.

Replicating the requirement for full-time employment could also prove challenging, as it may limit the pool of eligible applicants (both artists and cultural organisations). In many artistic professions full-time employment is standard, while for others it could take the form of an artist residency under an employment contract. Alternatively, a stipend-based approach would allow support for freelance or self-employed artists. Regardless of the operational details, it is essential to emphasise the need for a similarly systematic approach to address the plight of artists at risk.

17 This can be seen in practice with European programmes such as [Culture Moves Europe](#), [Perform Europe](#), and more.

18 The [EU Immigration Portal](#) is an online resource that provides practical information on both EU-wide and national immigration rules, tailored to different types of professionals, including researchers. It offers detailed, country-specific guidance on admission requirements, necessary documents, and application procedures. Available in multiple languages, the portal serves as a comprehensive and user-friendly guide for navigating the immigration process across the EU.

19 While the rights afforded under scientific/researcher visas vary across EU Member States, in most countries there are provisions for family members to join the researcher. The relevant EU directive addressing the mobility of third-country researchers is the [Directive \(EU\) 2016/801](#).

About the Author

Martina Hájková is a lawyer and cultural manager currently working with the Association of the Professional Theatres in the Czech Republic, National Theatre and National Institute for Culture (project of InfoPoint for the cultural sector). She has rich experience not only in theoretical but especially practical aspects of work in the cultural sector which she passes on to art school students in preparation for the transition to practice. She is now starting her PhD focusing on the current issues of international cooperation in the performing arts in the context of the posting of workers, social security and international taxation.

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To fully appreciate the breadth of the research on The Situation of At-Risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals, please do consider reading the **other chapters** gathered in this third report, as well as the first two reports available for download: **[Intersecting Temporalities: At-Risk and Displaced Artists in Transition – Volume 1 Scoping Review](#)** and **[Policy and Practice in the EU: Pathways, Impediments, and Patchwork Solutions – Volume 2 Cultural Policy Analysis](#)**.

Annex: Evaluation criteria in detail

1. Excellence (up to 35 points)

The following subcriteria will be considered to assess the academic excellence of each candidate-researcher:

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| <p>1.1. Academic achievements (quality and type of studies and research, general average grade, grade development, duration of studies) and, especially for postdoctoral candidates, academic career to date</p> <p>1.2. Number and quality of peer-reviewed publications, reports, studies, and others</p> | <p>1.3. Motivation: academic, professional and personal reasons for the proposed project</p> <p>1.4. External assessment letter</p> <p>1.5. Other achievements (e.g. patents, lectures, conference participation, prizes, additional scientific or practical skills, etc.)</p> |
|---|--|

2. Implementation (up to 30 points)

The following subcriteria will be considered to assess the implementation quality of the project, in terms of research proposal and hosting plan for the researcher:

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| <p>2.1. Quality of the research proposal (up to 15 points)</p> <p>2.1.1. Quality of research project and preparation (originality, topicality and relevance of the project)</p> <p>2.1.2. Quality of supervisor/mentor statement, suitability of choice of host institution and academic supervisor/mentor</p> <p>2.1.3. Feasibility and consistency of work plan and schedule</p> <p>2.1.4. Significance of the research project and planned stay in the host country for the researcher's academic, professional and personal development</p> <p>2.2. Quality of the hosting plan (up to 15 points)</p> <p>2.2.1. Working conditions as well as administrative support and practical support included in hosting plan (e.g. family, mental health, language support, etc.)</p> | <p>2.2.2. Academic support included in the hosting plan (e.g. supervisor's support, peer support, mentoring programs, etc.)</p> <p>2.2.3. Academic responsibilities/outputs contemplated (teaching activities, studies/papers published, contribution to ongoing projects, etc.)</p> <p>2.2.4. Opportunities for networking and exchange at national and international level</p> <p>2.2.5. Post-fellowship plan: Opportunities for career development, financial support, and any arrangements contemplated for securing successful academic or non-academic opportunities after the fellowship; quality of commitment (if any) of the host institution to providing concrete post-fellowship employment or funding</p> <p>2.2.6. Opportunities for fostering open science, innovation and entrepreneurship (as appropriate)</p> |
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3. Impact (up to 35 points)

This criterion refers to the situation of risk specific to the researcher and is assessed on the basis of the information provided by the host institution in the risk description form and on additional evidence, if available. The following subcriteria and, where available, supporting documentation will be considered:

3.1. Particularity of risk experienced: Is the risk faced by the researcher of a general or situational nature, such as due to armed conflict in his/her home country? Is the risk more specific to the researcher, perhaps arising from his/her academic pursuits, research topics, or personal actions related to civic or political engagement? Does the risk stem from the researcher's personal characteristics such as his/her ethnic, sexual, gender identity or religious beliefs?

3.2. Quality/extent of risk experienced: What forms of repercussions has the researcher experienced, or is he/she expected to experience? Examples may include the loss of academic positions or privileges, censorship, surveillance, travel restrictions, harassment, unfair prosecution, imprisonment, specific threats to life, torture, and other forms of physical violence.

3.3. Severity of risk experienced: Is the researcher currently exposed to this risk, or has he/she been able to flee? If so, does he/she face the possibility of having to return to the location of risk e.g. because of a temporary residence permit that will not be extended? If the researcher is in an EU Member State, what type of residence permit does he/she have and how long is it valid?

3.4. Evidence of risk: Are there any clear, objective proofs of a past or ongoing risk situation for the researcher? Such evidence may include dismissal notices, court summonses, imprisonment records, credible written threats, censorship attempts, social media posts related to personal activism, medical or legal documents detailing specific incidents, supporting documentation from humanitarian organisations, witness statements, reports and news articles from reliable journals on relevant conflicts, official evacuation orders, etc. The official recognition of a protection status is also considered objective evidence of the risk situation.

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