Terms of Reference for Applicants

SAFE - Supporting at-risk researchers with fellowships in Europe

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1. Purpose of these Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference for Applicants aim to provide potential host institutions applying for a SAFE Fellowship with essential information, including a general overview of the scheme, eligibility criteria, application requirements, and the evaluation process.

2. Overview of SAFE - Supporting at-risk researchers with fellowships in Europe

2.1. Background and objective

Science and research – and thus also a country's ability to develop – can only thrive if critical questioning is possible. This basic requirement of scientific work – engagement in critical discourse - often makes researchers, scientists and scholars targets of political persecution and violence. Academic freedom is under threat in numerous countries, where attacks on academic communities remain alarmingly prevalent[1].

This is in stark contrast to the European Union's (EU) commitment to academic freedom and scientific research. In response to the growing global need for a safe environment in which at-risk researchers can continue their work, the EU funds the SAFE project, with a budget of EUR 12 million. The project provides fellowships to non-European researchers facing threats in their home country, supporting them to continue their academic work in a European country. The project recommendations will support the establishment of a permanent European support mechanism for researchers at risk.

2.2. The implementing consortium

The SAFE project is implemented by a consortium composed of four partners: the **German Academic Exchange Service** (DAAD), responsible for overall coordination and the application and selection process, the **Mediterranean Universities Union** (UNIMED), managing the matchmaking service, **Campus France,** responsible for the communication and fellowship management and **Collège de France/PAUSE**, responsible for capitalisation.

2.3. Target groups

The SAFE project aims to provide **fellowships to doctoral and post-doctoral researchers at risk.**

Researchers at risk within the scope of the SAFE project include doctoral and post-doctoral researchers 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)

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[1] As documented by SAR's Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/academic-freedom-monitoring-project-index/.

- The researcher´s academic work, actions and/or associations (e.g. due to his/her field of research, or due to his/her involvement in political, civic, or social activities grounded in liberal and democratic principles, or due to his/her associations with similarly threatened individuals or groups)
- The researcher´s personal identity (e.g. his/her ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious beliefs)

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].

Following these considerations, the available SAFE fellowships will be awarded between **two tracks**:

- **Track 1: Researchers at risk without EU citizenship currently outside the EU** who are facing threats in their country of residence or have recently fled their country of residence to a third country due to such threats and have neither refugee nor subsidiary protection status there.

- **Track 2: Researchers at risk without EU citizenship who are already in an EU Member State,** either with recognised refugee or subsidiary protection status in the EU[3], or researchers outside the refugee process holding or applying for temporary permits/visas in an EU Member State.

3. About SAFE Fellowships

The aim of the SAFE project is to provide a total of **60 fellowships** distributed between the two tracks as well as between doctoral and postdoctoral candidates. The exact number and allocation of fellowships will be determined by the selection committee and will also depend on the duration of the fellowships awarded.

SAFE fellowships are awarded for a **minimum of 12 months up to 24 months. Fellowships must end no later than August 2027[4].**

Should a doctoral candidate complete his/her doctoral/PhD research while supported by a SAFE fellowship and defend his/her doctoral/PhD thesis, the goal of the fellowship will be deemed achieved and the fellowship will be paid until the month following the award of the doctoral/PhD degree (by the date on the certificate[5]).

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[2] Researchers at Risk: National-level actions in Europe, 2021, https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document//Inspireurope%20National-level%20Actions%20for%20Researchers%20at%20Risk.pdf.

[3] In general, researchers with recognised refugee or subsidiary protection status in the EU are permitted to conduct their research projects only at host institutions located in the EU Member State where they were granted that status. When applying, host institutions must ensure that the researcher's residence status in the EU allows them to conduct the proposed project at their institution.

[4] Selected fellowship applications that are planned to extend beyond August 2027 will be shortened, if necessary, and awarded only for the period until that date.

[5] If the certificate is issued at a later date, the end month of the fellowship will be determined based on an official declaration from the host institution confirming the date on which the thesis was successfully defended.

The fellowship will be awarded to selected doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to conduct research at an academic or non-academic research organisation based in an EU Member State. The fellowship is paid directly to the host institution, which is responsible for transferring the funds to the selected researchers through a formal employment contract. Institutions must ensure they are able to pay the amounts to the researchers as specified below.

Fellowship value:

- **Doctoral/PhD:** 3400 EUR monthly salary contribution (gross) + 600 EUR mobility monthly allowance
- **Post docs:** 5080 EUR monthly salary contribution (gross) + 600 EUR monthly mobility allowance
- Possibility for family allowance[6]: 660 EUR
- Possibility for special needs allowance[7]

Host institutions:

- 1000 EUR monthly contribution to research training and networking
- 650 EUR for management and indirect contribution

4. Eligibility

4.1. Host institutions

Institutions eligible to apply for the SAFE project and host researchers are academic or non-academic research organisations[8] established in an EU Member State.

"Academic organisation" means public or private higher education institutions awarding academic degrees, public or private non-profit research organisations for whom one of the main objectives is to pursue research or technological development. "Non-academic organisation" means any socio-economic actor not included in the academic sector.[9]

Host institutions must submit an application on behalf of the prospective researcher they intend to host. Institutions receiving funding are required to sign an employment contract with the researcher for the entire duration of the SAFE fellowship, in accordance with the relevant national legislation of the host country, including social security and social benefits.

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[6] A family allowance is paid "if the researcher has or acquires family obligations during the action duration, i.e. has persons linked to him/her by (i) marriage, or (ii) a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country or region where this relationship was formalised; or (iii) dependent children who are actually being maintained by the researcher", https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-2-msca-actions_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf, page 118.

[7] The special needs allowance contributes to the additional costs for the acquisition of special needs items and services for researchers with disabilities, whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are certified by a competent national authority, and of such nature that their participation in the action may not be possible without them (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).

[8] This includes Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or research organisations as defined by the European Commission: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:323:0001:0026:EN:PDF , C 323/9.

[9] According to the definition published by the European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/faq;keywords=/653.

Eligible institutions interested in submitting an application but lacking contact with a suitable researcher at risk can use the SAFE project's [matchmaking service](#).

4.2. Researchers

The following eligibility criteria apply for candidate-researchers:

(1)   Candidates must be
   a. Doctoral/PhD candidates
         i. who are enrolled in a doctoral/PhD programme or have started their doctoral/PhD studies[10] at the time of application.
        ii. The start date of the doctoral/PhD studies should be no earlier than 5 years prior to the application deadline.
   b. Postdoctoral researchers (i.e. in possession of a doctoral degree at the time the fellowship is set to begin):
         i. who have up to 8 years of full-time equivalent research experience, starting from the date they received their doctoral degree.
        ii. Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered eligible to apply[11].

(2)   Candidates must have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities at the envisaged host institution

(3)   Candidates must not hold EU citizenship

(4)   Candidates must face or have faced qualifying risks (for more details on the risk assessment of SAFE, see Section 5, 'Evaluation and selection process and criteria'), e.g. discrimination, persecution, imprisonment, surveillance, censorship, violence as a result of:

-   General circumstances (e.g. armed conflict, civil unrest, low level of academic freedom)

-   Their academic work, actions and/or associations (e.g. due to their field of research, or 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)

-   Their personal identity (e.g. ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious beliefs)

Eligible researchers can either be outside the EU and outside the refugee process (**Track 1**), or within the EU with recognised protection status or holding or applying for other temporary

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[10] For candidates who have started their doctoral studies at an institution other than the applicant host institution, the academic supervisor/mentor must specify how it is ensured that the research project can be continued at the host institution, including considerations of intellectual property rights and data ownership, or a different research project must be formulated that addresses these aspects to prevent any legal or administrative conflicts.
[11] The successful defence must be final (no further requirements/corrections that need to be addressed) and take place before the call deadline. Supporting documentation must be submitted with the application.

visas/residence permits (**Track 2**) (see Section 2.3., 'Target groups'). Researchers with a pending application for protection status[12] are not eligible for the SAFE project.

The SAFE project team has developed an **Eligibility and risk questionnaire** to assist potential host institutions in checking the eligibility and risk of candidate-researchers. **Institutions are strongly encouraged to complete this questionnaire before considering handing in an application**.

5. Application

The SAFE project welcomes applications from all domains of research and innovation. For exceptions, please refer to Section 7, 'Ethical Issues', points (a) to (d).

Applicant institutions must not submit more than **one application** which will be submitted **on behalf of one researcher.** The application must be endorsed by the head of the institution.

Multiple applications by the same institution are not permitted. In this case, only the first submitted application will be considered for evaluation. Similarly, if different host institutions submit their applications on behalf of the same researcher, only the first submitted application will be considered for evaluation.

Each SAFE project application must include an ethical self-assessment (see section 7, 'Ethical Issues,' for further details).

All applications must be submitted in English. For documents in other languages, please include an English translation[13]. Copies of identification documents do not need to be translated.

5.1. How to submit an application

Applications must be completed and submitted online by the potential host institutions on the application platform.

The applicant host institutions must identify a contact person responsible for the application. This person must be employed by the host institution and will serve as a contact person throughout the application process. The contact details of the contact person must be institutional, including at least an institutional e-mail address.

For selected application documents templates will be made available on the SAFE website and must be completed and submitted with the application (see Section 5.2, 'Application requirements', for further details). An offline version of the application form will also be made available for orientation and preparation.

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[12] A decision on the application for protection status must be available by the time of submission, as supporting evidence must be provided with the application.

[13] If certified copies of documents in other languages are not available, documents translated by the researcher-candidate may be accepted. The DAAD reserves the right to request certified copies of the documents, if necessary.

The link to the online application platform will be available on the [SAFE project website](#). **The online application platform will be accessible from 18ᵗʰ November 2024 to 20ᵗʰ January 2025, at 23:59 (CEST).** Submissions after this deadline are not possible.

Please note that once an application has been submitted, no changes can be made, or additional documents sent. We strongly recommend that you do not submit until you have gathered all the necessary documents and information. However, applications can be saved as drafts prior to submission and completed at a later date within the deadline.

5.2. Application requirements

To be communicated in due time.

6. Evaluation criteria and selection process

To be communicated in due time.

6.1. Evaluation criteria

6.2. Overview of the process

Step 1: Eligibility check

Step 2: Preliminary assessment

Step 3: External evaluation

Step 4: Final selection

Step 5: Notification of the results

Step 6: Signing of fellowship agreements

7. Ethical issues

All funded research projects must comply with national and EU research ethics regulations. The following areas of ethical concern need to be considered:

1. Human embryonic stem cells and human embryos
2. Humans
3. Human cells or tissues
4. Personal data
5. Animals
6. Non-EU countries
7. Environment, health and safety

8. Artificial intelligence
9. Other ethical issues

Supported research must focus exclusively on civil applications. The following research activities are not eligible under any circumstances:

a. activities directed at human cloning for reproductive purposes
b. activities intended to modify the genetic make-up of human beings that could make such changes heritable (apart from research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be financed)
c. activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purposes of research or stem cell procurement, including the technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer
d. activities that lead to the destruction of human embryos

Each SAFE project application must include an ethics self-assessment form. The application must also designate a contact person at the host institution who is responsible for any ethical issues. For detailed guidance on ethical issues, please refer to the European Commission's guidelines, *EU Grants: How to Complete Your Ethics Self-Assessment*[14].

If ethical issues are identified in the form, the person responsible for ethical issues must collaborate with the candidate to complete a more detailed ethics-related statement. This includes identifying the necessary information to provide and determining which formal ethics approvals may be required, as well as the timeline for obtaining them. The information to be provided in this statement must follow the instructions given in the ethics self-assessment form relevant to the identified ethical issue. Failure to provide the required additional information where an ethical issue has been identified will result in the formal exclusion of the application. Please note that full formal ethics approval is not necessary at the application stage but will be required at a later stage[15].

This contact person will be responsible for all ethical issues raised, will ensure that required approvals are obtained, and will act as the point of contact for ethical matters for the candidate, the host institution, and the SAFE project team throughout the application, evaluation, and fellowship periods.

8. Frequently Asked Questions

For further clarification, you may consult the SAFE FAQs section.

9. Support contacts

Please consult these Terms of Reference and the FAQs before submitting a question to the SAFE project team.

For any questions about the **matchmaking service,** please contact info.safe@uni-med.net.

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[14] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf.
[15] If the application is selected for funding, failure to obtain and provide to the SAFE project team full formal ethics approval will result in the withdrawal of the funding offer.

For any questions about the **application and the evaluation process,** please contact info.safe@daad.de.

For any questions about the fellowship **agreements and the hosting of researchers during the fellowship period**, please contact SAFE@campusfrance.org.

10. Relevant links

- SAFE Project website: http://www.saferesearchers.eu/
- SAFE Project matchmaking service: https://saferesearchers.uni-med.net/
- SAFE Project eligibility and risk questionnaire:
  https://www.daad.de/surveys/837796?lang=en
- MSCA Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk: https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/about-msca/guidelines-for-inclusion-of-researchers-at-risk
- European Charter for Researchers:
  https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter
- EU Grants: How to complete your ethics self-assessment:
  https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf
- Open Science: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/our-digital-future/open-science_en