



SAFE

Supporting
At-risk researchers
with Fellowships
in Europe



Funded by
the European Union

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1.0	21.10.2024	Initial version.
2.0	31.10.2024	Section 5 'Application' and Section 6 'Evaluation criteria and selection process' have been added.
3.0	04.12.2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The eligibility criteria for researchers (Section 4.2) modified• Step 2 of the selection process (Section 6.2) modified.



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Terms of Reference for Applicants

SAFE - Supporting At-risk researchers with Fellowships in Europe

Version 3: 4 December 2024



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



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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 prevalent¹.

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 postdoctoral researchers at risk**.

Researchers at risk within the scope of the SAFE project include doctoral and postdoctoral 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:

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

- General circumstances (e.g. armed conflict, civil unrest, low level of academic freedom)
- 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 countries².

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 EU³, 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 2027⁴.**

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

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.

doctoral/PhD degree (by the date on the certificate⁵).

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: 660 EUR
- Possibility for special needs allowance⁶

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 organisations⁷ 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.⁸

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

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.

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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.

⁸ According to the definition published by the European Commission: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/faq;keywords=/653>.

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.

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 face or have faced qualifying risks (for more details on the risk assessment of SAFE, see Section 6.1, 'Evaluation 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)
- (2) Candidates must not hold EU citizenship
- (3) Candidates must be
 - a. Doctoral/PhD candidates who are enrolled in a doctoral/PhD programme or have started their doctoral/PhD studies⁹ at the time of application
 - b. Postdoctoral researchers (i.e. in possession of a doctoral degree at the time the fellowship is set to begin¹⁰)
- (4) Candidates must have the language skills required to successfully conduct their research activities at the envisaged host institution

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 visas/residence permits (**Track 2**) (see Section 2.3., 'Target groups'). Researchers that are still in the refugee process¹¹ are not eligible for the SAFE project.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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. 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.

¹¹ 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.

The SAFE project team has developed an [Eligibility and risk questionnaire](#) to assist potential host institutions in assessing the eligibility and risk of candidate-researchers. **Institutions are strongly encouraged to make use of this tool 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.

Applications must be submitted as described in Section 5.1 and must include the documents specified in Section 5.2 below. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

All applications must be submitted in English. For documents in other languages, please include an English translation¹². 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, forms will be made available on the SAFE website and must be completed and submitted with the application (see Section 5.2, 'Application documents', for further details). Please ensure that you use only these forms. The form provided for the external assessment letter (see Section 5.2, document 1.5) must be submitted separately from the application. Further instructions for its submission are included on the form itself. If more than one assessment letter is submitted for the same researcher, only the first letter will be considered.

¹² 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.

An offline version of the application form will also be made available for orientation and preparation.

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 (CET).** 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 later within the deadline.

5.2. Application documents

The following documents will have to be included in the application. Unless otherwise indicated ('if applicable', 'if relevant', 'if available'), all documents are considered mandatory. The documents are clustered according to the evaluation criteria that will be applied and used during the evaluation and selection process as described below in Section 6.

All documents must be clearly legible and must be submitted in PDF format. Each file should not exceed 5 MB.

The below list can be used as checklist to guide the process:

0. General documents

0.0 Online application (to be completed on the online application platform)

0.1. Data processing consent form signed by the researcher (*form will be provided on SAFE website*)

- *Identification documents:*

0.2. Copy of ID or passport of the researcher and all accompanying family members (if any)

0.3. Copy of current residence permit (or, if not available yet, visa) of the researcher (mandatory for Track 2 and for Track 1 in case of current location in a third country)

1. Documents relating to the “Excellence” evaluation criterion

1.1. **Letter of motivation** (max. 2 pages, min. font size: 10) outlining the academic, professional and personal motivations for the proposed project in the host country and at the specific host institution

1.2. **Curriculum vitae** (max. 3 pages, min. font size: 10) of the researcher with details on academic achievements and career to date

1.3. **List of publications** (max. 10 pages, min. font size: 10) categorised by publications in reviewed journals, specialist books, conference papers and with details of the type of publication (original work, review, etc.). The status of the publication must be indicated for each publication (published, in print, accepted, submitted). If available,

the URL, DOI and any other identifiers must be provided for processing by the selection committee (if applicable for doctoral/PhD fellowships, mandatory for postdoctoral fellowships)

1.4. Selection of up to 3 most important publications (max. 1 page, min. font size: 10), with explanation of the reasons for their selection (e.g., significant scientific results, high relevance to the planned research project, innovative methodological approaches, etc.)¹³ (if applicable for doctoral/PhD fellowships, mandatory for postdoctoral fellowships)

1.5. External assessment letter written and signed by a professor within the same academic field as the proposed research project, who is not or will not be the candidate-researcher's supervisor or mentor and who is not employed at the applicant host institution. The external letter is confidential and it must provide a detailed assessment of the researcher's academic profile and excellence. The assessment must be independent and based on a personal exchange, such as an interview or meeting, between the referee and the researcher (*form and instructions for submission will be provided on SAFE website*)

1.6. Academic certificates as follows:

a. For doctoral/PhD fellowships

1.6.1.a. Master's degree (or equivalent) indicating final grade(s)

1.6.2.a. Master's degree complete **transcript of records**, incl. explanation of grading

1.6.3.a. Proof of having started the doctoral/PhD project (e.g. last enrolment as a doctoral student, admission to the doctoral project, confirmation letter from a prior or prospective academic supervisor, transcript of records, etc.)

1.6.4.a. Progress report on the topic and status quo of the doctoral project (max. 3 pages, min. font size: 10)

b. For postdoctoral fellowships

1.6.1.b. Master's degree (or equivalent) indicating final grade(s)

1.6.2.b. Master's degree complete **transcript of records**, incl. explanation of grading

1.6.3.b. Doctoral/PhD certificate (or, if not available, provisional certificate or official confirmation of successful defense of the doctoral thesis) and, if applicable, **transcript of records**

1.6.4.b. Short summary of doctoral/PhD research project (max. 3 pages, min. font size: 10)

2. Documents relating to the “Implementation” evaluation criterion

2.1. Detailed statement by the academic supervisor/mentor at the host institution evaluating the researcher's academic profile and achievements, the proposed research project, and the time plan. The statement should also explain how the

¹³ If several authors are involved, the researcher's own contribution must be specified. For each publication, please provide the URL, DOI, and any other relevant identifiers, if available. If the publications are not accessible online, individual articles may be uploaded in exceptional cases. However, please avoid attaching entire monographs to the application.

project aligns with the supervisor's research specialisation. This statement is confidential and should not be shared with the candidate (*form will be provided on SAFE website*)

- 2.2. Research proposal** (max. 15 pages, min. font size: 10) developed by the researcher, outlining the research objectives, key research questions or hypotheses, theoretical framework, methodological approaches, and a detailed description of the individual steps involved in the research process
- 2.3. Time plan** of the proposed research, including, if applicable, any planned visits or short-term stays at other institutions and/or phases of field research
- 2.4. Detailed hosting plan** for the fellowship and post-fellowship period, signed by the head of the host institution approving the application. The plan should outline the working conditions, academic and administrative support that will be available to the researcher, as well as any networking opportunities and opportunities for fostering open science. It should also include a post-fellowship plan detailing any planned measures to enhance post-fellowship opportunities, skills and career development. The host institution will also be asked to provide information on its experience in hosting researchers at risk and any measures implemented to ensure their safety (*form will be provided on SAFE website*)
- 2.5. Ethics self-assessment form** (*form will be provided on SAFE website*)
 - 2.5.1.** If applicable, **additional information and/or documentation** relating to any identified ethical issues (see Section 7, 'Ethical issues', for further information)

3. Documents relating to the “Impact” evaluation criterion

- 3.1. Risk description form** with detailed information on the researcher's risk status to be completed by the applicant host institution (*form will be provided on SAFE website*)
- 3.2.** If available, any **supporting evidence** regarding the researcher's risk situation (such as dismissal notices, court summonses, imprisonment records, credible written threats, censorship attempts, social media posts related to personal activism, documents detailing specific incidents, supporting documentation from humanitarian organisations, etc.)

By submitting an application, **the host institution must confirm the following** in the online application form:

- a. That the researcher meets the SAFE project eligibility criteria (cf. 4.2), and he/she has the language skills required to successfully conduct his/her research activities at the host institution
- b. That it has interviewed the researcher, either online or in person
- c. That it has verified that the candidate does not hold an EU citizenship (e.g. in the case of dual citizenship). If the host institution becomes aware of such a case, it will immediately inform the SAFE team
- d. That all information and documents submitted by the researcher, including transcripts and degree certificates (either original documents, certified copies, or alternative verifiable documents), have been thoroughly reviewed by the institution to the best of

its knowledge and judgement and are deemed sufficient for the researcher to carry out his/her project

- e. That all documents required for travel to the host country in the EU (such as valid passports of the researcher and any accompanying family members, or, if not available, alternative travel documents) are available and have been verified by the host institution, or that assistance will be provided to the researcher to obtain valid documents in time for the proposed start date of the fellowship. Alternatively, the host institution confirms that the researcher's current residence status in the EU permits him/her to conduct the proposed research project at the institution at the proposed time in compliance with the European Union's and national residence legislation
- f. That it is unaware that the candidate is currently in the refugee process
- g. That it is unaware of any factors that would speak against awarding the fellowship, such as issues concerning the researcher's personal integrity, potential conflicts with legally binding principles of scientific ethics, the Rules of Good Academic Practice¹⁴, or risks related to arms-relevant technological transfers as defined by legal regulations. Should any such information come to light during the selection process or if legal action arises regarding a breach of the Rules of Good Scientific Practice, the institution will immediately notify the SAFE project team.

Additionally, the host institution must commit to the following in case of a SAFE fellowship award:

- h. Assisting the researcher in obtaining the necessary visas, residence permits, and any required documentation for his/her research stay. The institution will offer comprehensive support in all practical matters related to the researcher's travel to, and stay in, the host country. If necessary, the institution will act as an intermediary between the researcher and the relevant authorities
- i. 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. Furthermore, the institution commits to paying the researcher according to the salary scale applicable to the SAFE project (see Section 3, 'About SAFE Fellowships') and it also agrees to offer the candidate any required information and assistance to ensure full compliance with relevant labour laws
- j. Following the open science approach as stipulated by the European Commission and applying a respective data management plan as referred to in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide¹⁵
- k. Complying with EU and project-specific visibility and communication guidelines, as further detailed in the fellowship agreement
- l. 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

¹⁴ https://www2.daad.de/medien/deutschland/stipendien/formulare/rules_of_good_academic_practice.pdf, page 1.

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf, page 41.

6. Evaluation criteria and selection process

6.1. Evaluation criteria

The selection will be based on the criteria 'Excellence', 'Implementation' and 'Impact' as specified below. To attach particular importance to the researcher's personal situation and qualifications, with the exception of the preliminary assessment (see Section 6.2, Step 2), more points can be scored in the criteria 'Excellence' and 'Impact'.

1. Excellence (up to 35 points)

The following sub-criteria will be considered for the 'Excellence' criterion:

- 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
- 1.2. Number and quality of peer-reviewed publications, reports, studies, and others
- 1.3. Motivation: academic, professional and personal reasons for the proposed project
- 1.4. External assessment letter
- 1.5. Other achievements (e.g. patents, lectures, conference participation, prizes, additional scientific or practical skills, etc.)

2. Implementation (up to 30 points)

The following sub-criteria will be considered for the 'Implementation' criterion:

- 2.1. Quality of the research proposal (up to 15 points)
 - 2.1.1. Quality of research project and preparation (originality, topicality and relevance of the project)
 - 2.1.2. Quality of supervisor/mentor statement, suitability of choice of host institution and academic supervisor/mentor
 - 2.1.3. Feasibility and consistency of work plan and schedule
 - 2.1.4. Significance of the research project and planned stay in the host country for the researcher's academic, professional and personal development
- 2.2. Quality of the hosting plan (up to 15 points)
 - 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.)
 - 2.2.2. Academic support included in the hosting plan (e.g. supervisor's support, peer support, mentoring programs, etc.)
 - 2.2.3. Academic responsibilities/outputs contemplated (teaching activities, studies/papers published, contribution to ongoing projects, etc.)
 - 2.2.4. Opportunities for networking and exchange at national and international level

- 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
- 2.2.6. Opportunities for fostering open science, innovation and entrepreneurship (as appropriate)

3. Impact (up to 35 points)

This criterion is assessed on the basis of the information provided by the host institution in the risk description form (see Section 5.2, document 3.1). The following sub-criteria 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.

6.2. Overview of the process

The application and selection process will be coordinated by the DAAD. The stages of the selection process are as follows:

Step 1: Eligibility check

Step 2: Preliminary assessment, if applicable

Step 3: External evaluation

Step 4: Final selection

Step 5: Notification of the results to applicant host institutions

Step 6: Signing of fellowship agreements with the host institutions

The preliminary assessment ('Step 2') will only be deployed if the number of eligible applications to the fellowships available exceeds a ratio of 1:2 (i.e., more than 120 applications for 60 fellowships).

Each step is explained in more detail below:

Step 1: Eligibility check

All applications will be assessed against the eligibility criteria set out above (see Section 4, 'Eligibility'). Ineligible applications, i.e. applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria or are incomplete, will be excluded.

At this stage, applications will be divided into Track 1 and Track 2 and will be evaluated in the appropriate group.

Step 2: Preliminary assessment

The eligible applications will go through a preliminary assessment on the basis of the criteria and documents set out below. The DAAD will assign a score of up to 30 points (10 points per criterion) along with a written preliminary assessment for each application.

The preliminary assessment will result in an initial ranking of all applications. The best 120 applications will automatically progress to the external evaluation phase (Step 3).

The criteria for the preliminary assessment are as follows:

1. Excellence (up to 10 points)

A preliminary assessment will be made primarily on the basis of the following document:

1.5. External assessment letter

In case the preliminary assessment does not result in a clear ranking of 120 applications, the following documents (see Section 5.2) will be analysed for clarity, coherence, and in terms of academic achievements: letter of motivation (1.1), curriculum vitae (1.2), Master's degree and Transcript of Records (1.6), *for postdoctoral fellowships*: list of publications (1.3), selection of up to 3 most important publications (1.4), doctoral degree and short summary of doctoral/PhD research project (1.6.b); *for doctoral fellowships*: progress report on the doctoral project (1.6.a).

2. Implementation (up to 10 points)

A preliminary assessment will be made on the basis of the following documents:

- 2.1. Academic supervisor/mentor statement
- 2.4. Hosting plan

The supervisor/mentor statement will be evaluated based on his/her assessment of the candidate-researcher, the level of detail provided as well as the level of commitment demonstrated. The hosting plan will be assessed in terms of specificity and detail provided for each of the sub-criteria outlined in Section 6.1 (2). Particular weight will be given to the post-fellowship plan (see Section 6.1 (2), sub-criterion 2.2.5) along with any outlined employment opportunities that the institution envisions for the candidate within its framework following the fellowship period.

In case the preliminary assessment does not result in a clear ranking of 120 applications, further documents (see Section 5.2) such as the research proposal (2.2) will also be assessed based on adherence to the formal aspects and on the inclusion of a detailed time plan (2.3).

3. Impact (up to 10 points)

A preliminary assessment will be made on the basis of the following documents:

- 3.1. Risk description form
- 3.2. Supporting evidence of risk, if available

The information provided will be assessed in terms of plausibility and as to whether the applicant institution has adhered to the guiding questions.

Step 3: External evaluation

Each application passing the eligibility and preliminary assessment stages will be assessed by two external reviewers (three, if applicable – see following paragraph) for criteria 1 'Excellence' and 2 'Implementation'. Reviewers will be internationally recognised experts in the research field of the candidate-researcher but independent from the host institution.

Each application can receive a score of maximum 100 points during the external evaluation, based on the point allocation for each criterion as outlined in Section 6.1. 'Evaluation Criteria'. In case of deviations of more than 15 total points or more than 5 points per criterion between the two ratings related to criterion 1 'Excellence' and criterion 2 'Implementation', a third external expert review will be obtained. The overall score for these two criteria will be the mean of the two individual assessments, respectively – in case of three assessments – the mean of the two assessments closer to each other (excluding the third "outlier" assessment to ensure fair treatment of applications).

Another reviewer with regional expertise relevant to the researcher's region of origin and independent from the host institution, will separately assess criterion 3 'Impact'.

Applications must score at least 60% of the maximum points for each evaluation criterion and a minimum of 60 points overall, otherwise they will be excluded from the selection process.

As part of the evaluation of the application, the reviewers will also comment on whether the application reveals any particular aspects that speak against funding and require further review (e.g. possible conflicts with principles of scientific ethics, danger of dual use technology and knowledge transfer in the sense of legal regulations, etc.).

Step 4: Final selection

The final selection will be made by a selection committee in a (virtual) meeting. There will be no interviews with individual candidate-researchers.

The selection committee will comprise individuals who jointly cover expertise in science and academia, research management and policy, as well as risk assessment and regional knowledge. One or more ethics advisers will be assigned to the committee as well. In addition, the SAFE Coordinating Committee (comprised of senior members or representatives of the implementing partners) will participate in the final selection meeting.

Prior to the selection meeting, the DAAD will compile a file for each application, which will be made available to the selection committee. Each file will contain the application documents as well as the assessment from Step 2 and the written evaluations of the external experts from Step 3. All applications will be accessible to all members of the selection committee. Each member of the selection committee will be assigned a share of the applications to be reviewed in detail.

The selection committee will have the final authority to decide on the award of fellowships, balancing the gravity of the risk, the excellence of the researcher, and the quality of the research project and hosting plan. For this purpose, the selection committee may adjust the average score resulting from Step 3: External evaluation.

The final selection will result in a ranking of all applications based on the total score out of a maximum of 100 points. The approximately first 60 applications will be funded. The best remaining 30 applications scoring at least 60 points but not within the funding range will be placed on a reserve list.

Step 5: Notification of the results

Application results will be communicated to the applicant host institutions via the institutional email address of the contact person designated in the application form. The host institutions are responsible for relaying the results to the candidate-researcher.

Applicant host institutions excluded during Step 1: Eligibility check will be informed of the rejection upon completion of this step. Upon completion of Step 4: Final selection, institutions will be informed whether their application has been selected for funding, placed on the reserve list, or rejected.

Selected applicant institutions will have two weeks to accept the funding offer. Failure to do so within this period will result in the withdrawal of the offer.

Institutions whose applications are placed on the reserve list will also have two weeks to confirm their continued interest. If no confirmation is received within this period, the application will be removed from the reserve list.

Redress procedure: Applicants who believe an error has been made in the evaluation of their application may submit a request for redress. The request must be submitted by the dedicated contact person, as indicated in the application form, to the DAAD via email. Requests for redress submitted by other parties will not be considered.

Only one redress request per application will be accepted which must be submitted at the latest two weeks after receiving the selection results.

The request for redress must clearly outline the grounds for the complaint. It may only be submitted on procedural grounds, such as factual errors, deficiencies in the eligibility check or evaluation process, or the existence of a conflict of interests, but cannot be requested on the merits of the application itself or on the comparison of the evaluation of proposals from other host institutions. Disagreements based on differences in opinion about the results will not be considered.

After the two-week period, the SAFE Coordinating Committee will review the validity of all redress requests submitted during an online meeting. If the rejection is found to be due to an error in the selection process, the results will be adjusted accordingly, otherwise, the applicant institution will be informed that its request has been rejected.

The decision communicated following the request for redress is final.

Step 6: Signing of fellowship agreements

Selected institutions that accept the fellowship will receive from Campus France a fellowship agreement to be signed, including details on the financial arrangements, payment schedules and reporting obligations. The agreement will include annexes detailing the applicable rules and regulations (e.g. the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers¹⁶, Open Science Statement, EU Visibility Guidelines, as well as templates for narrative and financial reporting).

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

¹⁶ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/code>.

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*¹⁷.

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 stage¹⁸.

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.

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf.

¹⁸ 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.

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.

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



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

