

SAFE – Supporting At-risk researchers with Fellowships in Europe

Terms of Reference for External Reviewers

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1. Purpose of these Terms of Reference

The purpose of these Terms of Reference for External Reviewers is to provide them with essential information, including a general overview of the SAFE funding scheme, evaluation criteria, details of the selection process and the requirements for being appointed as an external reviewer. More general information on the project, eligibility criteria and application requirements for applicants can be found in the [SAFE Terms of Reference for Applicants](#).

2. Project Overview

SAFE is a fellowship scheme for non-EU researchers who are facing or have faced risk in their home country. As a 12M€ pilot scheme, SAFE will support up to 60 **doctoral and postdoctoral researchers** of any non-EU nationality to work at higher education and research institutions based in the EU **for a minimum of 12 up to 24 months**.

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 at the time of application**, either with recognised refugee or subsidiary protection status in the EU, or researchers outside the refugee process holding or applying for temporary permits/visas in an EU Member State.

Researchers will be selected on the basis of the danger they face or have faced in their country of origin, the scientific excellence of their proposed research and the quality of the hosting measures offered by their potential host institution. The call for applications will be open from 18th November 2024 to 20th January 2025. Applications will be submitted by potential host institutions.

The SAFE project team is looking for **academic experts and regional experts** who will act as reviewers for the project and evaluate the applications. It is only through the contribution of such experts that this project can be made possible and that fellowships can be awarded to the most deserving candidates.

3. How to submit an expression of interest

Interested experts can submit their expression of interest via the following platform:

[Expression of interest: Reviewers for SAFE - Supporting At-risk researchers with Fellowships in Europe](#)

They will be asked to provide information on their current position, academic qualifications and area of expertise, as well as a detailed curriculum vitae.

From around January 2025, the DAAD will contact by e-mail the experts who are deemed suitable to assess the applications.

4. External Reviewers

In order to cover all the evaluation criteria related to the project, we are looking for

1. Reviewers with **academic expertise** to conduct a subject-specific assessment of the applications and an assessment of the proposed hosting plan for the researcher by the applicant host institution. Experts of **all academic disciplines** are required.
2. Reviewers with **regional expertise** and a deep understanding of human rights frameworks, as well as political and social dynamics, to evaluate the risk situation related to the candidate-researchers to be hosted in Europe. This includes region-specific expertise from across the globe, particularly from countries currently in crisis or where academic and/or personal freedoms are restricted.

Reviewers will support the project **on a voluntary basis**, i.e. no payment is provided for the evaluations.

4.1. Requirements for participation

The following individuals are eligible to act as **academic** reviewers for the SAFE project:

- Professors employed full-time at a higher education institution
- Holders of junior professorships and tenure-track professorships at higher education institutions
- Senior scientists or junior research group leaders at non-university research institutions or other relevant structures

For PhD applications, reviewers can also be

- Full-time and part-time academic staff at universities, HEIs, research organisations or other relevant structures holding a doctoral degree and possessing a higher academic qualification than the PhD candidate under evaluation

Regional experts should also meet the above requirements, or, alternatively, they may also be recognised experts working in foundations, ministries, university and research administration, provided that they can attest the required regional knowledge and expertise in terms of human rights law frameworks, political, cultural and socioeconomic dynamics in the region of expertise and other relevant areas.

All categories of experts mentioned above should also bring the following additional expertise:

- International experience
- Very good English knowledge
- Experience in the supervision of foreign students and researchers and/or participation in international cooperation projects

Reviewers will be assigned according to the research area of incoming applications and expertise of the reviewer. The DAAD will strive to achieve gender balance in the appointment of reviewers.

4.2. Impartiality of reviewers

To guarantee that decisions are objective and made only according to the selection criteria, reviewers will not be assigned to assess applications from the institution in which they themselves are employed. In case a reviewer is assigned an application by an individual with whom they have a private or professional relationship, reviewers are expected to report this to the DAAD immediately so that the application in question can be passed on to another reviewer. By completing the evaluation form, each reviewer declares his/her impartiality.

4.3. Confidentiality and data protection

The protection of personal data is a top priority for us. Since application documents and selections are regularly based on personal data, which is protected in particular by the regulations of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), all those involved are obliged to maintain confidentiality and to handle application documents with care. The following confidentiality conditions apply, including:

- All documents and personal data made available or otherwise disclosed shall be treated as strictly confidential and shall not be made available to third parties either in whole or in part
- The personal data provided may be used and processed only insofar as this is necessary for the purpose defined or for processing the funding project
- All documents which reviewers receive, including copies and backups, must be returned or deleted immediately upon request or if the purpose for use ceases to apply
- Reviewers are not granted the right to use the documents and personal data for their own purposes
- Confidentiality requirements, as aforementioned, are further detailed in a separate confidentiality declaration.

5. SAFE Fellowship Selection process and Evaluation criteria

The following provides an overview of the selection process and criteria for SAFE fellowships, along with details on the responsibilities of the external reviewers:

5.1. Overview of the selection process

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

The DAAD will conduct an eligibility check and verify that all applications are complete. In case the number of eligible applications in relation to the fellowships available exceeds a ratio of 1:2 (i.e., more than 120 applications for 60 fellowships), a preliminary assessment (Step 2) will be conducted by the DAAD. On the basis of this assessment, the DAAD will prepare an initial ranking of all applications. **The best 120 applications according to this ranking will be shared with the external reviewers for evaluation.**

5.2. External evaluation

During Step 3, each application will be reviewed by three reviewers – two academic experts independently assessing the academic excellence of the candidate-researcher and the quality of the proposed project as well as the hosting plan and one regional expert assessing the risk situation of each candidate-researcher.

The reviewers are asked to record their assessment in an evaluation form as written, discursive assessment and a score related to different subcriteria. The assessment is based on the defined selection criteria ('Excellence', 'Implementation', 'Impact'). For details on the selection criteria, please refer to section 5.3 below.

Finally, the evaluation form also asks for an assessment of whether the application reveals aspects that speak against funding and require further review, e.g. possible conflicts with the principles of scientific ethics¹ and/or risk of dual use technology and knowledge transfer in the sense of legal regulations², etc.

It is planned that **each reviewer receives approximately 10 to 12 applications** for review. The application documents³ and project-specific evaluation forms will be made available to the reviewers via a cloud service.

Each application can reach a score of up to 100 points. 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).

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.

5.2.1. Timeline of the external evaluation

The external evaluation is expected to begin in **mid-February 2025**. Reviewers will have approximately three weeks to evaluate their assigned applications, with a **final deadline of around 9 March 2025**.

¹ See the guidelines of the European Commission on "Identifying serious and complex ethics issues in EU-funded research", https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/guidelines-on-serious-and-complex-cases_he_en.pdf.

² See guidance note of the European Commission on potential misuse of research results, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/guidance-note-potential-misuse-of-research-results_he_en.pdf.

³ For an overview of the documents that are submitted with each application, please refer to the SAFE Terms of Reference for Applicants, section 5.2.

After this deadline, the DAAD will collect all evaluations and calculate the average score for each application. If a third evaluation is required (see section 5.2. above), additional reviewers will be asked to evaluate the relevant applications in the week of 10 March 2025. The second deadline for the additional evaluation will be around 19 March 2025.

5.3. Evaluation criteria

The external reviewers will be asked to evaluate their share of the applications against the criteria listed below. Academic experts will assess the criteria 1. 'Excellence' and 2. 'Implementation', while regional experts will be asked to evaluate separately criterion 3. 'Impact'.

1. Excellence (up to 35 points)

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

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

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 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.

Equal opportunities: The selection process must be carried out in a non-discriminatory way. When assessing the candidate's 'Excellence', due attention must be paid to gender, health impairments, care obligations or dependence on employment and if any of these factors have had a diminishing or prolonging effect on the performance or duration of studies, number of extracurricular activities and the like.

Candidates have the opportunity to provide information in the application form and, if applicable, in a letter of motivation about disadvantages they have experienced during their studies or in their research work, if they wish to do so.

Moreover, the different career stages under consideration (i.e. doctoral or postdoctoral candidates) should be taken into account and should be weighted accordingly, e.g. regarding the number and quality of publications.

6. Website and Contact Information

For more information on the SAFE project, please visit the following website: [SAFE - Supporting !\[\]\(e3f8612927870f2e0f9f5989e6dd3064_img.jpg\) At-risk researchers !\[\]\(a86c7d1c9cb81c81614634a31267440d_img.jpg\) with Fellowships in Europe.](#)

For any questions regarding the call for reviewers, please contact info.safe@daad.de.