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# Rewarding mobility? Towards a realistic European policy agenda for academics at risk

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## Abstract

This article maps from a critical and comparative perspective how scholars at risk are currently being integrated into the European research infrastructure, as well as in various EU and non-EU Member States. The focus is on three countries ranging from older to newer EU members to one non-EU member state—Hungary, Romania and the United Kingdom—as well as on EU-level organisations. We draw on twelve in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in the process of academic migration (non-governmental organisations, EU and national level actors) to identify key issues concerning academics at risk. Finally, we call for a robust EU-level response to an issue that is currently inadequately addressed by national governments, professional associations and NGOs. As we argue, the focus on mobility as a factor supporting research excellence in the regular European research infrastructure can have negative unintended outcomes for scholars at risk. For many of them, rewarding mobility can entail the threat of losing their legal status in temporary places of migration. What is needed is a nuanced approach for scholars at risk in a diverse range of situations, which should involve closer cooperation between international academic bodies and EU policy makers, and complement support for those who need to escape to third countries with the offer of remote work in the country where they are able to obtain a secure residence permit.

**Keywords:** Academics at risk, Authoritarianism, Academic policy, Asylum, European reform, Academic mobility, Knowledge exchange, Exile, Migration

## Introduction

Mobility has been a central characteristic of European scholarly lives since the Middle Ages. The notion that mobility contributes to academic success, as measured by outcomes such as full-time employment or career advancement in national higher education institutions, especially early in one's career, has become a basic assumption (Welch, 1997, 330; Mamiseshvili, 2010; Ivancheva & Gourova, 2011; Jacob & Meek, 2013; OECD, 2013; van der Wende, 2015; Israel & Cohen, 2022; Krannich & Hunger, 2022; Euraxess 2022; EUA 2019). In this article, we present a critical and comparative perspective on the way the positive reinforcement of mobility affects academics at risk in the EU and its

neighbourhood (for the framework in question, cf. e.g. Marie Skłodowska Curie actions, Erasmus actions).

As scholars have begun to point out, historically, conditions such as political persecution and forced displacement had a diverse range of consequences for academics as well as societies at large, including negative effects, such as precarious employment for the displaced, brain drain for their countries of origin, and a closing in of academic inquiry as a result of isolation and censorship (Beatson & Zimmermann, 2004; Björklund & Tuori, 2019; Crawford et al., 2017; Gusejnova, 2020; Gusejnova & Bourke, 2020; Kmak, 2019; Obermayer, 2014; Abu-Assab, 2017). In particular, living under conditions of war or persecution imposes restrictions on mobility and leads to temporary as well as long-term adjustments to conditions of censorship and repression (Migration data portal, 2022).

The criterion of mobility as a dimension of excellence defined by terms such as internationalisation has attracted criticism even in the cases where academic careers were not affected by risks from authoritarian regimes and wars (cf. European Charter for Researchers, 2005; Morano-Foadi, 2005). For instance, concerns have been raised about issues such as gender equality and mobility opportunities, especially given the unfair advantage that the emphasis on mobility gives to candidates with the 'best' citizenship index or gendered position within a relationship in earlier career stages (Ackers, 2008; Schaer et al. 2017; Avellis & Didenkulova, 2016; Băluță, et al., 2012; Jöns, 2011; Scott Cohen, 2020; Winslow, 2016; Appelt, et al. 2015). Others have noted that mobility as a whole has become a self-affirming discourse (Bauder, 2015). Under conditions of enforced exile, the imposition of mobility as an enabling factor for excellence adds a further burden. By rewarding mobility, many academic support schemes push scholars at risk to the limits of their legal status as temporary migrants in third states.

Just as supporting academic careers in times of peace builds on the blueprint of mobility, it would seem, so enabling mobility is often presented as the main solution to supporting scholars at risk from war and persecution (Cf. Fermi and Immigrants 1968; Bailyn and Fleming, 1969; Baker and Zeiliger, 2019). Today's academics who leave their countries to escape humiliation, trials or house arrest, or who lead a precarious existence in their current places of work, fall under two provisions: that for 'regular' academic mobility and exchange, and that for asylum-seeking non-academics. Asylum procedures tie at risk academics to a destination in a way that is usually directly harmful to their academic careers. While they may gain personal security, their careers are even more disrupted. In terms of integrating vulnerable academics, the EU and the UK face cumulative challenges from migration resulting from wars in the Middle East, Afghanistan and now Ukraine (Bergan et al., 2020; Bubbers, 2015; CARE, 2016; Dogan & Selenica, 2020; Etkind, Rutten et al., 2021; European University Association, 2015; Poleschuk, 2021), the sharp rise in academic persecution in Russia and Belarus (European Union, Council Directive 20 01/55/ EC of 20 July 2001; European Council Recommendation 2021/22; Feischmidt et al., 2019), as well as from the erosion of democracy in EU states (Koper & Mohamadhossen, 2020; Petö, 2020 and 2021). In this context, with few exceptions, research on academic expulsion continues to be dominated by works on World War I or World War II, which concentrate on the immediate support of flight from the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied

Europe to the United States as a response to risk from totalitarianism and war. Other relevant work focuses on refugee integration in general, a broad field in which the particular circumstances of academic communities are difficult to address (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2017; Kmak, 2019, 2015 and 2014). In contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship, the field of academic refugee and integration studies has been revitalised by an analogous connection to this past experience in the wake of the 2015 crisis and the plight of refugees from the Middle East and, since 2021 and 2002, Afghanistan and Ukraine. In this context, the EU continues to be seen primarily as a destination and safe haven for academic exiles. We believe that this pattern of interpretation itself needs to be problematised. In particular, much more work needs to be done on the way academics at risk are subsequently being integrated or deployed in host societies, particularly in Europe.

Our research, funded and supported by CIVICA (The European University of Social Sciences), aims to support and strengthen the ways in which the EU and individual European countries might respond to at risk academics today (For reference on existing policy objectives, see, for example, European Commission 2019). Migrant academics are a distinct group for us because they are treated as such by some—though not all—national migration regimes. In calling for a more realistic policy regarding scholars at risk, we draw attention to the need for a closer look at the risks actually experienced by academics who seek to develop their careers in EU countries more generally. Currently the vast majority of studies regarding academics at risk or forced mobility assume that academics at risk come from non-EU countries and choose western EU countries as a destination. By including Romania, we are assessing one newer EU Member State as a place of mass influx for scholars at risk. Furthermore, by looking at Hungary, we are touching on the ambivalent role of an EU country that is both a place of destination for scholars at risk from countries affected by wars, such as Russia's war against Ukraine, and a place where higher education institutions are under threat from illiberal regimes within the EU itself, such as Hungary's own illiberal state. In choosing the UK as one of our case studies, we took account of the current state of the EU, threatened by processes not only of migration but also of dramatic internal transformation and political instability, looking at its research infrastructure as a result of political processes such as Brexit, and at its political structure as a union of states which share democratic and liberal values.

Since the end of the Cold War, the flow of academic refugees to the EU has increased not only from regions ravaged by civil wars and international interventions outside Europe, but also from parts of Europe (EU and non-EU) where authoritarian regimes have emerged. Most worryingly, the EU itself has been affected by the erosion of democracy, as seen in countries such as Hungary (Petö, 2020) and Romania (Dragolea, 2022). In the EU, threats against science are part of the wider spectrum of attacks in countries where democracy is under pressure. In this regard, linking the deterioration of democracy and democratic institutions and practises to academic resistance and repression requires expanding the limiting framework of academic free speech or even autonomy to an examination of the larger context of democratic erosion in the EU (Bergan et al., 2020). This area of suppression of academic freedoms within the EU and the resulting migrations has received comparatively little attention, with some notable exceptions (Petö 2020; 2021).

The article is structured as follows. After a brief overview of the challenges for academic migration in contemporary Europe in the first section, in the second section we outline the methodology of the research. In the third section, we outline the current legal framework for granting visas to academics; in the fourth section, section we discuss the specificities of asylum seeking by academics and the way that academics at risk are treated in the three national systems; in the fifth section, we examine how academics at risk and academics who have been granted international protection are integrated in their new host countries; and in the sixth section, section we focus on the role of the EU in the protection of academics. The final section concludes with tentative directions for future policy advice based on an expanded research agenda along the lines we propose.

### **An overview of the challenges for academic migration in Europe**

There are several factors that exacerbate the crisis of academic migration to and within Europe today. First, the sheer volume of displaced academics is disproportionate to the existing capacity of government migration assistance and support from professional associations (see Lim et al., 2018; EUROSTAT, 2022a, 2022b; International Organisation for Migration, 2022; McGrath & Lempinen, 2021). Out of this gap have emerged grassroots and network initiatives such as Science for Ukraine, which, alongside wider civic initiatives, have shown remarkable speed and creativity in gathering information on available support for Ukrainian academics, an effort that has been supported by governments across the EU and the UK (Scienceforukraine.eu; Byrska, 2022). However, even if such initiatives are supported by the EU, this is only a drop in the ocean compared to the support needed. The very structure of many EU funding calls separates youth training and academic exchange (Erasmus) from research development (Horizon) in a way that doubly exacerbates the plight of academics with precarious status, both within academia and in terms of visas and permits. At risk academics are thrust into the role of recipients of humanitarian aid and depend not only on governments or local authorities, but also on their former colleagues and collaborators for existential support, creating ethically problematic dependencies. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the academic solidarity networks that have emerged in the face of the war in Ukraine are unprecedented in the history of international responses to war.

Secondly, support for academics and students at risk tends to be framed in categories centred on individuals based on their nationality. However, in reality, situations of risk are specific to other kinds of social categories, from families to the nationals of third states, or conditions of risk specific to gender or sexuality (For a historical reference, cf. Berghahn 1995 and Abu-Assab, 2017; Pietsch 2017; Sidhva et al. 2021). To illustrate the complexity of this particular situation, by April 2022 alone, more than 7 million civilians have been internally displaced and more than 3 million forced to emigrate as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine—by October, the number is far higher. It is estimated that, as of 12 October 2022, more than 338,000 third-country nationals (TCNs) have fled Ukraine since 24 February 2022 (IOM Migration Report, 2022). Of these, 76,548 international students from 155 countries were studying in Ukraine. Almost a quarter of these were African students, some of whom had come to Ukraine as part of the long-standing, originally Soviet-inspired exchange programmes (Tardzenyuy Thomas, 2022). However, many of the regular national evacuation programmes administered by Ukraine and

other European states did not seem to apply to them (DW, 2022). Neither the European Union, nor the UK, nor the post-Soviet successor states acknowledged the existence of a gap created by the rapid erosion of successor programmes to the extensive Comintern-funded academic exchanges between USSR, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Latin America after the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Calori et al., 2019; Marung, 2021). Addressing emergency migration as a result of this failure has resulted in systemic racial discrimination and is an issue that is currently left mainly to African governments to address (Mensah, 2022; Mwareya, 2022). Moreover, just as in the Syrian migration crisis, individual EU countries bear a disproportionate burden in receiving migrants, with the highest proportion of Ukrainian nationals granted temporary protection recorded in Estonia (1.9 granted temporary protection per 1 000 inhabitants) in August 2022, followed by Poland (1.8) and Lithuania (1.4) (Eurostat, 2022a). Currently, the EU does not even have a solid approach to classifying Ukrainian refugees in general, let alone academic refugees (Eurostat, 2022b).

Although academic support is the most direct way to support at-risk academics, the greatest threat to academics at risk often lies in the implicated status of their families, who cannot easily obtain administrative and visa support. Another challenge is the artificially, i.e. structurally, generated competition between at-risk groups from different regions, which leads to ethical dilemmas in ranking cases of risk between regions such as Syria, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, for which individual NGOs are often neither trained nor equipped to tackle (Biner, 2019). Even within Eastern Europe, assisting Ukrainians displaced by the war and Russians or Belarusians fleeing authoritarian governments poses very different types of risks and requires separate infrastructures.

Today, both the EU and the UK are once again at a crossroads: will they learn from the international history of supporting and integrating at-risk scholars, or will Europeans continue to take, at best, ad hoc and short-term measures to support expelled scientists, leaving the benefits to more strategic international competitors? We intend to undertake an in-depth comparative study of the different actors involved in the process of integrating scholars living in political exile in the EU, as well as the experiences of these exiles themselves. We want to know what administrative, financial, ethical, short-term and long-term circumstances, gender aspects, family dynamics and political backgrounds shape the experiences of these at-risk academics. We hope to find out how these circumstances create or prevent the conditions for their immediate well-being as well as their long-term contribution to the society of the destination country.<sup>1</sup>

## Methodology

This research seeks to explain how three different countries and one supranational institution deal with cases of academics at risk fleeing their countries of origin. In this regard, we conducted our research along two directions: (a) secondary research focusing on the visa system of the countries concerned, and (b) semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in the management of cases concerning academics at risk.

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<sup>1</sup> UK Government Immigration Data, FOI 70720, October 2022. The data for 2022 cover only the months between January and June.

Since this research is a data collection on a hitherto little researched topic and thus has an exploratory character, the semi-structured interview was a suitable method for conducting the research. The pre-determined questions focused the discussion on specific issues that the research seeks to capture, while the open-ended nature of the discussion allowed respondents to provide specific information that would not have been discovered through a structured interview. The questions asked during the interviews can be divided into three thematic categories, depending on the specific area they sought to shed light on: (a) questions on the procedure for granting visas for research or employment purposes relevant to academics; (b) questions on the procedure for admitting academics at risk entering the asylum process; and (c) questions on the integration of academic refugees and scholars at risk into the existing national and European research infrastructure. Interviews were conducted with individuals holding relevant positions in national and European agencies dealing with immigration and refugees, NGOs, universities and educational institutions such as agencies of the Ministry of Education. The interviews were conducted with the explicit consent of the interviewees. They were asked to read an informed consent form developed on the basis of the typical ethical guidelines for research of this kind and approved by the relevant ethics committees of the universities involved in the research.

Two important consequences arise from this diversity of interviewees. First, the interview questionnaire targeted specific areas depending on which institution the interviewee represented. For example, questions on the specific process of considering asylum applications of academic refugees were only relevant to NGOs and public institutions dealing with refugees, while questions on integration were relevant to all stakeholders, including universities and Ministry of Education institutions. Second, the interviews were conducted with individuals representing what the literature refers to as organisational elites (Delaney, 2007; Harvey, 2010). This type of interview raises significant methodological problems, the most important of which is the problem of access. Although Delaney (2007) states that there is no serious evidence that access to organisational elites is more difficult than to other types of subjects, given the politically sensitive nature of the topic (immigration and refugees) and the nature of the political regime in one of the countries in this research (Hungary), gaining access to representatives of the national immigration authority and the education authority was problematic. In Hungary, for example, the national authority responsible for the administration of asylum seekers refused the invitation to an interview, while in Romania the relevant authority refused a face-to-face or online interview and insisted on answering our questions in writing.

The data obtained from these interviews is analysed in this paper by focusing on three key thematic areas: (a) the nature of the visa adjudication process for academics at risk in the three countries and in the EU; (b) the admission of academics at risk in the process of applying for asylum; and (c) the integration of academics at risk into the current research infrastructure at both national and EU levels. By dividing the thematic analysis into key aspects of the path that academics at risk may take when departing from their country of origin, the paper provides a clear analytical account of current practises and the issues faced by academics themselves and the key actors

in this process. While the interview findings are central to our research, our analysis also draws on our review of current legal practise.

### **Caught between the risk route and the work route: academics in the legal framework of immigration**

Academics at risk can enter a country either as asylum seekers in need of international protection or through the usual immigration route by applying for a visa. In this section, we look at the latter route of entry. In the absence of a comprehensive EU-wide visa system, we have examined four different immigration regimes to see to what extent they have made efforts to specifically accommodate academics at risk: that of Hungary, Romania and the UK, as well as the routes available at the EU level. All three countries have options available, particularly for academics. In Hungary, there are three types of permits specifically for non-EU researchers, one of which does not apply to refugees or exiles. Romania has two types of visas that can be used by non-EU academics, while a third, more general 'for employment' visa may also be suitable, although it is not exclusively for researchers. The UK provides a visa called "Global Talent" primarily for academics and researchers. Another UK visa available primarily, but not exclusively, to researchers is the Temporary Work—Government Authorised Exchange visa, which is suitable for those who need to come to the UK for an internship or training, as part of a language programme, to conduct research, or to take up a fellowship. A third route in the UK is the more general 'Skilled Worker' visa, which applies to academics alongside a long list of occupations; to be eligible, the individual must have an offer of employment from a UK university or other approved employer, making it less suitable for at-risk academics. At the EU level, there is also the EU Blue Card for "highly qualified" persons, including academics, who have an employment contract or job offer from an EU employer.

The fact that these systems offer different visas raises the question of how these options differ from each other, especially in terms of duration. In Hungary, one permit is valid for researchers from non-EU countries for a maximum period of 180 days; the second option offers a validity period of six months to one year; the third option is a longer-term permit for one to two years, which explicitly does not apply to persons granted refugee status or those in exile. In Romania, the two types of visa are valid for 90 days for non-EU researchers, as is the third, more general 'for employment' visa. Although these visas are important for short-term research activities, they are not suitable for meeting the needs of academics at risk: They are temporary options that depend on cooperation with the educational institutions of the country of origin. The UK's 'Global Talent' and 'Skilled Worker' visas are valid for up to five years, while the 'Temporary Work' visa is valid for up to two years. The EU Blue Card is valid for between one and four years. It follows that while there is diversity between the four schemes, there is less diversity within each scheme. The Romanian options are all valid for up to 90 days, while the UK does not offer options specifically for short-term stays: A person must apply for a two- or five-year visa even if they intend to stay in the country for less time. In Hungary, on the other hand, there is a combination of short- and longer-term residence permits that can cover a wider variety of circumstances, and a similar situation applies to the EU Blue Card. However, these permits are not available in Hungary for refugee or exiled academics,

while the Blue Card is essentially a visa for workers. The duration of a visa is important as it can affect the criteria for obtaining the visa.

It was clear from our interviews in the UK that the purpose of the visa system, while generally an improvement for academics, is incompatible with the challenges faced by individuals at risk. The system is primarily aimed at facilitating the entry of people who want to work and is therefore structured around narratives of competitiveness criteria and financial and employment prospects, rather than providing stopgap and short-term solutions based on situational factors. As one interviewee (UK Interview #1) working at a British university put it:

*I suppose what the Home Office would say is 'if you're an academic at risk, if you're in genuine fear of your life, then you should leave the country and claim asylum in the UK'...They say, you know, you wouldn't come through a visa route because that would mean that you're coming here to work, not that you're in fear of your life.*

The speed with which scholars at risk need support requires support networks to act quickly, but interviews indicated that both academic funding bodies and EU-wide funding appeals work slowly. The situation of being at risk exacerbates existing inequalities between academics from countries with less prestigious international institutions and those in established institutions, and reinforces a number of other well-known inequalities, particularly in relation to gender and age. (Royal Society, 2019). The uneven development of disciplines, dating back to the Cold War period and affecting many successor states to the USSR, such as the comparatively low development of subjects such as Environmental studies, Law, and Gender Studies, makes it difficult to integrate displaced academics into EU research projects (Băluță et al., 2012).

Looking at UK immigration figures, there are some striking patterns, which are also reflected in the fate of academic migrants. Immigrants from different regions arrive in dramatically different gender ratios, a circumstance that may or may not be mitigated by the visa regimes used by academics. For instance, looking at the three years since the Global Talent scheme was launched, it appears that an average of 37% of those granted the visa were women; nevertheless, women applicants have had a generally high success rate, with 94.5% of female applicants having been granted the visa in 2020, 97.5% in 2021, and 86% in 2022; similar success rates exist for male applicants as well.<sup>2</sup> But while the success rates are high, the selective criteria of the Global Talent visa render it inaccessible to academics at risk more generally. One of our interviewees who works for a UK learned society explained that a suggestion was made to the Home Office in the light of the war in Ukraine to change some of the Global Talent criteria in order to make more people eligible for it, but that the Home Office response was that the „global talent visa is for long-term work in the UK leading to settlement rather than for individuals who are escaping crisis zones” (UK Interview #2).

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<sup>2</sup> Through the Students at Risk program refugee PhD candidates will receive a monthly scholarship: €350 for the first two years of their studies, and €455 during the last two years of their PhD program.



### **Academics seeking asylum as subjects of national governance**

In addition to applying for a visa and thus following the normal immigration route, academics at risk can also seek asylum in all three countries under focus, a route that is arguably more appropriate for their particular situations. Our research makes clear that the three countries have very different experiences and institutional realities when it comes to academics applying for asylum.

Hungary is at one end of the continuum, having had virtually no institutional acknowledgement of academics at risk before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. A major reason for this is that it is almost impossible to obtain refugee status in Hungary due to the increasingly strict refugee policies of recent years. As for the policy concerning academics at risk after the war began, the government focused on Ukrainian nationals without committing to improve the framework for dealing with academics at risk coming from other countries. After 24 February, Hungary initiated the first scholarship programme for war refugees. As one of our interviewees, who works at the largest Hungarian university, explained Hungarian universities are also facing new problems, as they have not had any comparable experience with refugee academics or researchers and, moreover, have not had an admissions policy for refugee academics until now. As the previously mentioned interviewee (Hungary Interview #1) explains:

*The Ukrainian refugees just appeared in Hungary, and they knocked on our door that they were here. And no, we [the university] had no applicable procedure or policy. What we have now was born from the fact that the university started receiving these letters from those fleeing the war in Ukraine [...] so I said let's try to give some sort of institutional answer.*

After 24 February, the Hungarian government launched the Students at Risk scholarship programme for students who had fled Ukraine, including PhD students. In contrast to the Ukrainians, the application period for the third-country nationals was shorter and they can only study natural sciences, which we believe is due to the labour market problems and the brain drain, which also strongly affects Hungary and other neighbouring countries.

The research conducted in Romania concerning academics at risk seeking asylum paints a picture of a country in transition—while not entirely foreign to Romania, as it has already had experience with this category of asylum seekers, the responsible agencies does not have a specific framework for dealing with them. Given the nature of the visas available, seeking asylum is the only adequate choice of academics at risk to come to Romania. An important point that became clear during the interviews is that although academics at risk going through asylum procedures in Romania are a reality, they are not recognised as a separate category of asylum seekers. As one interviewee (Romania Interview #1) puts it:

*If the person concerned has been politically persecuted, for example, for an article that was published or for a political view not approved by the authorities of the country of origin (...), it may be taken into account to consider the place of where the information has been disseminated or where the persecution happened. But it is not something specific—the social group of researchers; belonging to a social group, as the Geneva Convention says. I don't know if researchers could be included here,*

*rather it is about other social groups.*

While there are a small number of academics at risk who come to Romania from countries such as Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia or Afghanistan, the majority of cases of academics who have undergone asylum procedures in Romania in the last decade came from Turkey after the failed coup attempt of 2016 and the subsequent purges. All of these individuals received international protection in Romania following a judicial decision after being rejected at the administrative stage of the procedure, where the General Inspectorate of Immigration has the primary power to grant asylum. When asked about the decisions taken in these cases, one interviewee (Romanian Interview #1) explained:

*It depends a lot and has nothing to do with the level of education. In the case of Turkish citizens, the majority obtained a form of protection in Romania from a court, in the judicial phase, i.e. the second phase, and the decision remained final. In the case of Afghanistan, there was that resettlement program—these people evacuated from Afghanistan by the Romanian state together with other states. There, refugee status was offered in the administrative phase, but it was an exception.*

Unlike the other countries, the UK has a fairly advanced system for processing asylum claims from academics at risk. A key aspect of this is the activity of the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), which serves as a liaison between academics at risk from different countries and universities and government agencies. In this context, an interviewee (UK Interview #2) pointed out that "the day-to-day work with academics from around the world is largely left to CARA." This work is done both for academics seeking asylum and for academics who need help with visas and finding a suitable host university. Yet the UK system remains particularly inflexible when it comes to academics moving from seeking asylum to seeking work through the usual visa routes, making this early decision crucial to the way a particular individual is processed. Our interviewee (UK Interview #1), who works for a UK university, explained:

*Once you're in the UK, for example, and you were to make an asylum claim, if during that process you decided I actually I don't want to claim asylum anymore, I want to apply for a visa instead, the Home Office would view that in a very negative way, they would say that would damage their credibility. (...) You said you were in fear of your life, you said that you were fleeing a war zone, but now you actually want to work. You want a work visa. Well that's very different now so they would cancel the person's asylum claim giving them no status in the UK, and then they can move from asylum status into work. Very quickly your situation would be precarious, and you'd actually have to leave the UK, or you'd be removed.*

The situation of being forced to choose between acknowledging risk status for oneself and one's family and pursuing an academic career fear of "damaging credibility" is a serious obstacle in the support networks for this category of refugees.

As a result of this distinction between the need for work and the need for sanctuary, even those granted asylum in the UK cannot switch to a work visa. An academic at risk who wishes to continue to work professionally is therefore only left with the option of applying for one of the existing visas suitable for researchers. Although all of the UK respondents we interviewed indicated that these options have improved in recent years

by broadening their scope and relaxing some of their criteria, they are unsuitable for at-risk individuals. A key reason for this is cost, with the UK standing out both in comparison to our other two comparator countries and globally. A Global Talent visa application costs £623. In addition to cost, a second reason why existing visas may not be suitable is that refugee and academics at risk may not have access to the documentary evidence they need. Our interviewee (UK Interview #1) said,

*If you're an Afghan national fleeing the Taliban you're probably not going to have English language documentation, you are not going to have your prior qualifications with you, you are not going to have much.*

Participants in our interviews consistently confirmed the need for simplification in the processing of applications from academics at risk. Communication is hampered by difficulties in communicating with commercial subcontractors, such as the visa centres Vfs global, which are private contractors managing visa provisions, and the partners who run the biometric centres. It was noted that the situation for academics at risk is better now than ten years ago. The Global Talent visa introduced under the Johnson administration represented a huge improvement in opportunities for at risk academics over its 2011 predecessor, the Exceptional Talent visa. The graduate visa route which had been abolished under Theresa May was also reintroduced. According to one interviewee (UK Interview #2), “we have received significantly more applications this year [2022–23 not yet closed] and last year than in each of the previous three years”. Given this fluctuation, there is a risk that governments will change the rules faster than academic integration processes can adapt. In Global Talent in particular, the relationship between risk and excellence is unclear. The extremely high cost of applying—it costs a family of four of a skilled worker £16,000 to move to the UK, and a further £10,000 if such a family wishes to apply for indefinite leave to remain. (Royal Society, 2019). Cost is just one of the barriers to applying for this category of applicant. The UK government makes a profit of £2 000 on each visa application from such an at-risk person (UK Government, 2022).

### **National academic institutions and the process of integrating academics at risk**

Regarding the integration of academics at risk, we were interested in two key aspects: the relevant outcomes of academics at risk who move from their country of origin to one of the three countries under study, and specific integration policies targeting this category of individuals. An important finding that applies to all three countries is that the case of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict occupies a special position. For example, although Hungary does not have a broader institutional framework for hosting accepting at-risk academics, it has initiated a programme called Bridge for Transcarpathia, which focuses on university lecturers and students fleeing the war in Ukraine. The programme provides support for lecturers who had an active working status in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, at any higher education institution. In the case of the UK, even more generous support programmes were identified, with one interviewee explaining the particular situation of Ukrainian academics:

*The senior individuals at the University wanted to have a situation that if you were a Ukrainian national you could almost have kind of refuge at the University for an undefined period of time, and you would keep getting accommodation, you'd be*

*given access to help with assistance at university, you know Careers advice, or whatever it might be. (UK Interview #1)*

As the interviewee said, 'We've never done anything like that before.'

In the case of Romania, two general problems in the integration of academics at risk granted refugee status were identified during the research. First is the general issue of employment—as the stipend offered by the Romanian state is small (540 lei or 110 euros/person for a maximum of 12 months), quick employment is a necessity for most refugees who want to integrate. For academics at risk, apart from the problems with language and the appropriateness of their education for a different academic environment, there are no special procedures or partnerships with universities that could help them to be employed in the same profession as in their country of origin. An NGO expert (Romania Interview #1) said:

*I don't know of any cases of university professors in their country of origin who are university professors here. I know cases where they were employed as teachers at private high schools, that is, they tried to find an educational environment, but we also had situations where they were employed at perfume companies or in factories.*

Secondly, there is the issue of diploma nostrification system, and the Romanian system is characterised by a two-stage procedure. All diplomas of students, including doctoral and post-doctoral students, are recognised by the National Centre for the Recognition and Equalization of Diplomas, a central body under the Ministry of Education, while those of people seeking employment are recognised only by the university that hires them. While you do not need original documents to enter the labour market, if you want to continue your studies as a refugee in Romania, you have to present your original diplomas and relevant documents, as an interviewee from an NGO explains (Romania Interview #1):

*You cannot continue your studies. Regarding employment, yes, there is an understanding there, but if you want to be a master's student, a doctoral student in Romania, to do research, you need original diplomas because the Ministry of Education does not have the necessary leverage to verify diplomas. They can't go to the embassy of the country of origin and say: is this diploma Mr. X's? Because the country of origin finds out that X is here and not everyone needs to know that you are a refugee.*

An expert from a national academic institution in the UK, working closely with the Home Office, explained that the UK's Global Talent Visa depends on the support of several academic bodies, of which there are six in total. These are Tech Nation, Arts Council England, which endorses applications in the non-academic fields of arts and digital technology; the Royal Society, which covers the sciences; the British Academy, which covers the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; the Royal Academy of Engineering; and UKRI, which is responsible for applications from all disciplines that already have a named role in a UKRI-approved scholarship. Applicants can receive support through four routes, from academic appointments and scholarships to grants and personal recommendations (UK Interview #3). The involvement of such bodies highlights that academics at risk are most likely to receive protection if they can demonstrate academic excellence (Royal Society, 2019).

### **Civil society organisations and academics at risk: some examples of good practice**

In addition to national organisations, such as NGOs and universities, relevant to the situation of academics at risk, we also focused on relevant institutional practises at the European level. A key finding is the EU's general ad hoc treatment of problems related to academics at risk, both in the sense that there is no general framework for dealing with academics seeking refuge and in the sense that policies are usually developed in the midst of refugee crises, such as the one from Afghanistan in 2021 following the return of the Taliban or the crisis created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Maasen and Olsen 2007 with Science for Ukraine 2022).

Similar to the UK, where CARA plays an overarching role, the specific needs of academic refugees are not met directly by EU institutions, but by transnational NGOs such as the US-based Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) and Euraxess (Guthrie et al. 2017; Euraxess 2022). They act as intermediaries between academics at risk and universities and research centres with the aim of firstly verifying the risk and secondly providing temporary support in processing applications before they are forwarded to the universities. In general, they work both as actors carrying out a screening process for academics who indicate that they are at risk and as intermediaries between specific individuals and universities. Policy recommendations from these actors include advice such as the need to introduce 'sufficiently flexible funding instruments for researchers at risk, as well as for the institutions and organisations that support them.' They also argue that support structures should more clearly identify researchers at risk as potential recipients of support, while embedding support in long-term infrastructure development (Stoeber et al., 2022, 11–13).

An important point raised during our research is that the adjective 'at risk' should only be used temporarily for such people, as they don't want to be defined by this status, as one interviewee from a transnational NGO (EU Interview #1) explained: "Most of the academics that we speak with are clear as well that this at-risk adjective is something which they've taken on for a period, but they don't want it to be something that defines them.' Conversely, organisations need to be able to take into account the different categories of risk, including the risk posed by a scientist's research, the risk posed by the exercise of his/her/their rights as a citizen, or the risk posed by the overall situation in his/her/their location due to war or natural disasters. (Stoeber, Gaebel and others, 2022, 22).

Although years of practise in supporting academics at risk has helped these transnational NGOs to develop a network of partners at the university level, another important finding of our research is the heterogeneous nature of the support provided by universities. As one interviewee working at a transnational NGO explains (EU Interview #1):

*There's no good support structure in place at the university level. That means that there may be one dedicated professor who's always trying to essentially ask for funding either from departmental donations or from a provost or a rector. So that's another sort of context. For example, those kinds of universities I think, are increasingly trying to formalise the supports within say, their international offices*

*are trying to find a place for the work to support at risk scholars. That's structural, informal and can be replicated and sustained. And then there's other universities who just may not be having these conversations at all yet, or they may be harder conversations in particular country contexts.*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations: scholars at risk as the EU's canary in the coalmine**

Our preliminary research has revealed a number of examples of good practice, but also of shortcomings in addressing the needs of academics at risk. Of course, the interviewees have come from an elite-level analysis of the administration of scholars at risk. In the future, a more differentiated picture is called for, which takes into account informal networks and support, grassroots initiatives, and the self-help provided by the scholars at risks and their networks themselves.

At this stage, we can say that currently, academics at risk are particularly affected by differences in national approaches to forced displacement, asylum and nostrification of foreign degrees. In our research, we first mapped out the formal frameworks that have developed for academic migration and assessed their suitability for at-risk academics. The comparison of the legal frameworks shows that each of the systems is guided by different objectives. The UK aims to attract highly skilled immigrants ('Global Talent') rather than provide a short-term stopgap for academics at risk, which is reflected in the relatively high requirements that must be met and the duration of visas. The Romanian and Hungarian pathways, on the other hand, provide for visas as a temporary option. The EU Blue Card is a work visa, which is probably not suitable for academics at risk. The length of the various visa and approval procedures makes academics at risk of persecution vulnerable to vacillating between the logic of asylum and work. Romanian visas are not suitable to allow academics to continue teaching or conduct longer-term research, which often requires more than a three-month commitment. While the Hungarian options offer more flexibility in terms of duration—between six months and two years—the longer-term visa of one to two years is explicitly not open to refugees and exiles. While the UK options take into account the realities of academic research in terms of duration, the hurdle for granting the Global Talent visa is very high. Although the EU Blue Card could cover a range of circumstances in terms of duration, it is ultimately a work visa that requires both an offer of employment and the achievement of a certain salary threshold. Despite the differences in the governance and targeting of academic migration in general, we have seen so far in all countries that academics at risk are caught between the logic of the asylum seeker who is tied to his/her/theirs destination and the logic of the mobile academic, in their case not having access to this mobility due to their strained status within their home academic institution. They are thus cut off from both paths.

On the positive side, where academic integration of academics at risk works, it is supported by collaboration between academic institutions and non-governmental and civil society organisations such as CARA and Scholars at Risk, which effectively take over aspects of the vetting and verification processes that would normally be the responsibility of governments. These processes only work where professional and NGO bodies are supported by strong and coherent government policy on academics at risk, and are

easily overwhelmed in times of major crisis with a large influx of refugees. CARA is a UK-based charity that works closely with government and academic actors, while SAR is a US-based organisation that fills gaps not covered by the EU government.

Our first key recommendation at the policy level is therefore the need for a robust academic integration programme for vulnerable academics at the EU level, working with national governments and academic institutions to support academics at risk. Crucially, such a programme need not necessarily be linked to asylum procedures, and should in fact be decoupled from the system of rewarding mobility which characterises 'ordinary' European academic research and exchange programmes. As we have seen in the case of support for Ukrainian academic communities, support for war-endangered academics can include, for example, mobilising remote work opportunities particularly for men who are caught in limbo whilst neither being drafted, nor able to leave the country. Conversely, academics who may seek asylum through the normal emergency admission route may benefit from the availability of academic integration options that do not tie them to the geographical location that offers them protection. In other words, what is needed is a more diverse, gender-sensitive and nuanced approach to the needs of academics at risk (Louis 2013). Because the EU cannot offer support with issues such as visas and residence permits, which are the remit of national governments, it should at the very least not obstruct access to these primary goods with its reward mechanisms for academic excellence.

Secondly, we believe that support for academics at risk should consider them as active members of groups and networks and not only as individuals in need of humanitarian aid. Currently European policies implicitly seek to save the emigrants who also happen to be illustrious scientists. The opportunities offered by regular long-term programmes for academic excellence, such as ERC Synergy grants, are in practice unattainable to scholars at risk. Yet, excellence is as much an individual achievement, as it is a social and an institutional one (Dusdal et al.,s. 2020; Glynn, 1996). A scientist at risk can be assisted more comprehensively when supported as a part of a wider network or group, and will be supported more effectively when considered in a more realistic light as persons with further ties such as family and caring responsibilities (Musselin 2004; Wilson 2010). In this regard, we believe that the provisions that have emerged in response to the War in Ukraine represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Several interviewees pointed out that the quickly available special provisions for academics from Ukraine pose a challenge to the principles of equal treatment of refugees from other crisis areas and parts of the world. Even in the tightly controlled Hungarian higher education system, support for academics from Ukraine opened a space for autonomy and independent action. At the same time, support was often short-lived and lacked sustainable plans in case of a protracted situation of risk. Still, the fact that the international community has shown itself capable of mobilising support and cooperation on such a scale and in such a short time may indicate that the War in Ukraine can also serve as a precedent for significant structural improvements at both national and international levels, which may enable more effective support for academics and students at risk in future conflicts. Once they are in the EU, today, academics at risk are not only unable to benefit from the idea of academic mobility as a reward, but are often directly harmed by mobility as a norm of excellence, and settled status as a norm of residence.

Finally, when considering notions of risk in academia, scholars ought to consider the EU itself with greater differentiation and humility. Analysts have underestimated the threat to the EU's own stability as well as the democratic resilience of some of its member states. The new scholars at risk are not only yielding current stories of third-country exiles seeking refuge in the European research infrastructure. Their case can also function as the 'canary in the coalmine' for understanding shortcomings in the way the EU's own basic academic infrastructure exists in tension with national migration regimes within its changing borders.

### List of interviews

UK Interview #1, University representative, 20 June 2022.

UK Interview #2, Advocacy organisation representative, 18 July 2022.

UK Interview #3, National academic institution representative, 25 July 2022.

Hungary Interview #1, University representative, 2022.

Hungary Interview #2, NGO expert, 2022.

Romania Interview #1, NGO expert, 15 June 2022.

Romania Interview #2, University representative, 2 June 2022.

Romania Interview #3, Representative of an agency from the Ministry of Education, May 2022.

EU Interview #1, Transnational NGO representative, 2022.

EU Interview #2, Academic association representative, 2022.

EU Interview #3, EU-level agency representative, 2022.

EU Interview #4, University representative, by Bakos, Rebeka, 2022.

UK Government Immigration Data, FOI 70720, October 2022.

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### Author contributions

DG and AVT have written the final draft. AD and AP have co-designed the research and are co-authors of the paper. AVT, AP and RB conducted qualitative interviews and wrote summative sections on this basis.

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### Availability of data and materials

Data supporting the results is stored on the PIs institutional laptops. This data is anonymized.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

The project has received approval from the LSE Research Ethics Committee, 88214 (13 April 2020).

#### Consent for publication

All relevant consent forms have been obtained.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.



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