

## Joint Statement on the Current Situation of Researchers in Iran and other authoritarian contexts

As Associations of researchers active in advocacy activities, we are deeply humbled by the courage shown by Iranian people, and especially women, since the start of protests on September 16.

As Associations which advocate for human rights, we wish to express our unreserved solidarity towards the women of Iran and Afghanistan, and all oppressed women living in the world, who suffer with their connationals from privation of human rights, and are further discriminated against because of their gender.

As Associations which advocate for freedom to do research for all, we extend our solidarity to all researchers working in regions where academic and scientific freedom is not recognized and guaranteed, and where research can be a life-risk job.

As Associations which advocate for research ethics and integrity, we support the freedom to do research for all researchers who adopt their research methods to question the existing social, economic and political status quo, independently from their national origin, their cultural identity and ideological background.

### **Research as a crime**

The ongoing protests in Iran have raised the world public opinion's attention over violation of human rights once again. We know that violation of human rights is a daily reality for people living in many countries. Many of them are researchers.

Since the Islamic Revolution, a large number of researchers have been arrested, detained and tortured by the Iranian government because of their research activity and international networks. A case which has gained international attention, especially thanks to Amnesty International, is that of [Ahmad Reza Djalali](#). But there are many cases to be mentioned one by one here: the phrase "academic prisoners" is used to indicate them collectively. Of course, it is not an exclusive Iranian practice: in Egypt in 2016, the Italian PhD candidate Giulio Regeni was arrested, tortured and killed, while Patrick Zaki is currently facing trial, as too many of his [connationals](#).

To be women and scholars is even more dangerous, especially in political contexts as the Iranian and Afghan ones, where the Institutions are enforcing measures that restrict women's freedom and rights as humans, before that as scholars, as made evident by the recent decision of Afghan authorities to prevent women from accessing education. A criminalization of research to various degrees can be seen in other countries as well, for example in [Turkey](#) or in [Poland](#) and academic freedom is strongly threatened in other countries like in [Hungary](#).

### **Research as a tool for political change**

The relevance of the status of women and of that of gender roles in society is strongly

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highlighted by the case of the conspiracy theories on a so-called “gender ideology”. This ideology spreads widely, including [in Europe](#), where political movements call to “protect the traditional family” or the “respect of the religious faith” in order to take action against the academic system and to restrict all scientific research linked with gender studies.

We believe that because research is based on freedom of thought and expression, it provides citizens with ways to analyse and criticise social, economic, and political developments. Thus, it is dangerous for authoritarian regimes and for governments that, without being fully authoritarian, push their country towards a progressive restriction of freedoms.

We believe that research practice and findings can always have political implications, and thus can be equally important tools for advocacy. For this reason, academic and scientific freedom must be protected, as a founding element of democracy, from those who want to silence it and control it. It is thus crucial that Research Performing and Research Funding Organisations, as well as individual researchers, make it their priority to respect and value academic integrity, while actively guaranteeing academic freedom as a human right. At the same time, we can not advocate for academic and scientific freedom without supporting and protecting the freedom of thought and of expression as citizens: scholars are not separated from society, and we believe that their knowledge must be accepted also in the public debate as intellectuals, and not only as specialist workers restricted to their own field. Among all cases, we cite here as an example [the one that involved Turkish scholar Şebnem Korur Fincancı](#), highlighted by the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project of Scholars at Risk.

### **European researchers advocate for concrete support to researchers persecuted for their research activity**

As researchers’ associations who advocate to protect research ethics and integrity, and against any restrictions to academic freedom, we believe that the global academic community needs to be open to different approaches. As European-based Associations, we feel the need to highlight our support for the freedom of all scholars to carry out research from their chosen cultural and/or political perspective in a safe and respectful environment. This is even more important for those scholars who are based in, or come from, non-Western countries: their perspective can be novel to the majority of the European academic community, and thus they may be more exposed to epistemic violence or injustice. We all need to ensure that this does not happen.

Signed by [Oleksandr Berezko](#) [President European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers ([Eurodoc](#))], [Fernanda Bajanca](#) [Chair Marie Curie Alumni Association ([MCAA](#))], [Moniek Tromp](#) [Chair Young Academy of Europe ([YAE](#))], [Gordon Dalton](#) [Chair International Consortium of Research Staff Associations ([ICoRSA](#))] on 21.02.2023

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