GUIDELINES FOR UNIVERSITIES HOSTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

CONTENTS

PREFACE

I welcome this initiative that has brought together universities, NGOs, donors and human rights defenders, to co-produce guidelines for universities already involved in the protection of human rights defenders, and for those seeking to become more active. This document explains why this work matters, and provides a guide and set of tools that will be a valuable resource for university staff, and others, wishing to offer support and protection to those who defend human rights around the world, often at great personal risk.

Universities and other educational institutions traditionally uphold the value of academic freedom, but they can also be sites of activism and protection. They have an important contribution to make in the shared endeavour of protecting human rights defenders and enabling them to continue their human rights work. By hosting human rights defenders at risk, and their family members, universities have the potential to shape democracy, civil society and human rights through their actions.

My thanks go to the UNESCO Chair at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York (UK), and their collaborators who have done a great service in bringing together their experience, knowledge and practice in a comprehensive and accessible document. These Guidelines will elicit broad interest and enable more human rights defenders to find safety through participating in relocation initiatives at universities. I commend this work to a wide readership, and, in particular, to universities, and urge them to make a commitment to providing a safe space for human rights defenders.

Mary Lawlor

Mary Lawlor
UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

CONTRIBUTORS

The Guidelines were compiled by Pippa Cooper and Paul Gready at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, in collaboration with:

Berivan Orucoglu	McCain Institute at Arizona State University
Claudia Escobar Mejia	Be-Just, and formerly George Mason University
Daria Hulika	Centre of Cooperation and Solidarity Action, University of Burgos
Dmitry Dubrovsky	Central and East European Law Initiative, Charles University in Prague
Doha Abualhija	Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee
E. Andrés Celis Rodríguez	Pedro Arrupe Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto
Felipe Gomez	Pedro Arrupe Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto
Gorka Urrutia Asua	Pedro Arrupe Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto
Gustavo de la Orden	Pedro Arrupe Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto
Hannepes Taychayev	Human Rights Programme, American University of Central Asia
Harriet Fildes	Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee
Hussain Nussrat	Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee

Ivi Oliveira	Frontline Defenders
Kathryn Libal	Human Rights Institute, University of Connecticut
Leona Binz	Scholars at Risk
Leonardo Filippini	Human Rights Center, Faculty of Law, University of Buenos Aires
Lindokuhle Mandyoli	Politics and Urban Governance Research Group, University of the Western Cape
Marilyn Crawshaw	Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York
Masha Lisitsyna	Open Society Foundations
Mmeli Dube	Politics and Urban Governance Research Group, University of the Western Cape
Monica Lopez Baltodano	Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York
Natasha Khan	Leadership, Governance and Human Rights Programme, University of the South Pacific
Palak Rao	The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund
Patricia Bartley	Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York
Rommel Rodriguez	Sanctuary for National Minorities, University of the Philippines
Rosario Figari Layús	Chair of Reconciliation Studies, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University of Bonn
Saniia Toktogazieva	Human Rights Programme, American University of Central Asia
Sanna Eriksson	Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York
Vachararutai (Jan) Boontinand	Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University
Viviana Fernandez	Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa
Zerxes Spencer	National Endowment for Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Human rights defenders do extraordinary and inspiring work to protect our democracies, our freedom to speak and gather, our livelihoods, and our ability to live in peaceful and secure environments. In every society and every local community there are those who will speak out, stand up, and organise others to further justice, equality and fairness.

But in a context of rising populism and authoritarian rule, these defenders are routinely and increasingly under attack. Those who stand up for human rights take on one of the most dangerous callings in the world. In this context, what is the role of universities in supporting them? In what ways can universities meaningfully engage with human rights defenders at risk, stand in solidarity with them, and enhance the resilience and sustainability of human rights activism?

The focus of these Guidelines is on universities providing international support, although the content may also be of value to universities seeking to stand alongside local activists. Specifically, forms of university engagement can take the shape of visiting fellowships, residencies for human rights defenders, temporary relocation schemes, international exchanges, or scholarships. As such, the Guidelines will be useful for universities hosting formal relocation programmes; scholar and student activists at risk initiatives; defenders supported in more informal and indirect ways, e.g. scholarships for study or research; and where universities provide a home for human rights defenders who need to be outside their home country for longer periods. The Guidelines refer to all of these initiatives under umbrella terms such as 'protection schemes' or 'programmes'.

It is important to note that such interventions are of mutual benefit. An element of shrinking civic and political space for civil society is shrinking academic space and attacks on academic freedom. Lessons can be learned in both directions about pushing back. Further, while defenders benefit from university support through periods of respite, training and capacity enhancement, and networking, universities benefit from the presence of extraordinary individuals who light up the classroom, anchor and direct research, and inspire students, academics and wider university communities.

Universities should also stand alongside civil society because they are values-based institutions, with academic freedom constituting both a core value of universities and a central pillar of democracy and a vibrant public sphere. Further, universities draw on their histories, such as championing anti-colonial and independence struggles, and recent sources of inspiration, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, to shape their public and political engagement. These Guidelines assume values-based and instrumental reasons for enhanced university activism.

The Guidelines have three functions. They represent an **invitation** to get involved; a source of **inspiration** about why this work matters; and a **guide and set of tools** on how to provide support for human rights defenders. The Guidelines are designed to share good practice among universities already involved in protection work and to support other universities seeking to become more active.

Guidance is carefully structured to allow the reader to dip in and out, and to easily find information on specific concerns at all stages of the support process (setting up a scheme; pre-arrival; the programme itself; preparing for departure). Where the Guidelines draw on best practice, keep in mind that these practices have often been developed over many years. To get started does not require that everything in the Guidelines be adopted from the outset. At a certain point it is necessary to stop planning and simply initiate your programme; a great deal of learning can only be done by doing.

Part of the challenge of getting started is for a programme to position itself within the wider ecosystem of security and protection mechanisms. There are many national and regional, as well as issue-based, human rights defender networks. A **Protection Ecosystem Map** developed by Open Briefing allows users to filter for type of support, thematic focus, and / or regional focus. Universities hosting defender support schemes will need to work with these networks, and other partners, to avoid unnecessary duplication and on issues such as the selection of defenders and shared training.

The Guidelines were co-produced by a group comprising universities, NGOs, donors and human rights defenders, from different contexts, and from the Global North and the Global South, through a year-long collaborative process consisting of several stages: the drafting and circulation for comment of questions about the stages of relocation – setting up a scheme, pre-arrival, relocation itself, (post-)departure; online meetings to discuss responses and good practice relating to the questions; drafting of sections of the Guidelines for comment, including cross-referencing of relevant existing guidelines; and a meeting of collaborators in July 2024 in York to discuss a full draft of the document. A revised draft was sent out for comment towards the end of 2024. The Guidelines are a living document, and will be updated periodically.

SECTION ONE – GETTING STARTED

In this section, we present strategies for securing buy-in for programmes that support human rights defenders within a university. These include examples of approaches to encourage leadership teams, senior administrators and key departments to back your programme, and to galvanise interest more broadly within institutions. Next, the Guidelines provide suggestions about how programmes can be funded and staffed, with examples of funding models. The section concludes with a list of questions to assist hosts in establishing the key criteria of the programme and a discussion of the selection process. The latter includes the call for applications, nomination process, and the actual mechanics of how criteria are applied and selections made, with examples from universities currently running relevant programmes.

Defender of the right to education
of indigenous children, Philippines

Securing support

A key first step to establishing a programme is to secure support within the university. It may be helpful to develop a strategy for securing support, perhaps by aligning the programme to core university values, to vision or mission statements, or to relevant charters[1] and networks.[2] You may also wish to plan how you will address any concerns which might be raised, such as those relating to funding and risk.

It is important to consider both which individuals you require approval from, e.g. senior management, heads of departments – as well as which departments you will need assistance from, e.g. finance, human resources, legal office.

Whose support is needed among senior management, and how is it secured?

Securing support for the hosting programme among senior management at your institution is likely to be essential for its success. Existing relocation programmes have established relationships with key institutional allies at a senior level, for example the Provost, Rector, Vice-Chancellor, or President of the university, and then made sure to maintain this support and ownership by keeping stakeholders up-to-date and inviting them to key events. Getting middle management on board may also be important for specialist input and more day-to-day matters e.g. accommodation, security.

In time it is crucial to build support beyond key individuals so that the programme can survive 'regime change' or the departure of supportive staff or teams within senior management.

Why senior management support the international hosting of defenders

> *The Human Rights Defenders programme in the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), University of York, is remarkable in its own terms. It has supported over 100 defenders from over 50 countries both to take respite from their always challenging but often dangerous work, to stand back and reflect, to share their experiences with our staff and students, but also to study and learn in a supportive environment so they can take new insights and skills to their work. But it has also had a wider impact on the University, in clarifying what it means to be a University of Sanctuary, and how to make real a commitment to open the doors of the University to those displaced by conflict. Our founding Vice-Chancellor talked of caring about widening access to the University 'more than almost anything else'. We have found new ways of responding to this commitment in the last years, especially in responses to successive crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Palestine. CAHR's example has led the way for us.*

Professor Charlie Jeffery,
Vice-Chancellor, University of York

---

1   e.g. the *Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum*, which states: 'Universities acknowledge that they have a responsibility to engage with and respond to the aspirations and challenges of the world and to the communities they serve, to benefit humanity and contribute to sustainability'.

2   e.g. the *Talloires Network of Engaged Universities* and the *Global University Network for Innovation*.

Support for the African Universities Hub for Human Rights at the University of the Western Cape

> *The University of the Western Cape (UWC) faced significant challenges under the apartheid regime and was punished for its commitment to inclusivity. But it continued to be a beacon of resistance, attracting activists, academics and students committed to fighting the unjust system. Protecting democracy and defending human rights requires partnerships and collaborative relationships between intellectuals and activists. UWC's commitment to hosting human rights defenders as fellows through the African Universities Hub for Human Rights (AUH) demonstrates this and strongly resonates with our University's history and values. In light of the ongoing attacks against democracy and human rights, universities are the right spaces to enliven academic inquiry that supports activism around these ideals.*

Professor Matete Madiba,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Development and Support, University of the Western Cape

Securing support - Human Rights Defenders Protective Fellowship Programme
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

The Human Rights Defenders Protective Fellowship Programme at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) is run by the Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG) through the African Universities Hub for Human Rights (AUH) initiative. The idea of hosting human rights defenders was supported by PUG in the third quarter of 2023 after co-hosting a successful symposium, in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair, Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, on the role of universities in protecting human rights. For the symposium, PUG invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Development and Support (quoted above) to give an opening address. This involvement of the University leadership would prove crucial once PUG embraced the idea of hosting a relocation programme. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor's involvement would make it easier for them to become a member of an Advisory Group for the Programme, underscoring the importance of senior-level management support.

Relations and trust built over the years were also crucial in gaining support for the Programme. PUG's director, for instance, had occupied different roles in the faculty and across the University, fostering a deep understanding of University procedures. This helped PUG navigate the University system and attain the support of University leadership.

Another essential aspect of gaining support for the Programme was funding. Initial three-year funding made it relatively easy for the University to accept the Programme. However, externally funded activities will still need to align with the University's values and clearly add value to its mission.

PUG's framing of the Programme as fulfilling UWC's research mission and its social contribution, steeped in its rich history of nurturing anti-apartheid activists, helped canvas support across the University. PUG also leveraged its position as a Research Group, the least formal entity at UWC, with limited obligations to report to the University or faculty leadership. This administrative and regulatory 'grey zone' allowed PUG to experiment with many ideas and thus adopt the Programme without too many bureaucratic challenges. The Programme's inception also coincided with PUG's rapid growth and support from the Political Studies Department, the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) and the University leadership towards becoming a Centre within the University. Demonstrable success and the group's momentum were important in securing support.

It may help to make the case within your university if you can show you have other forms of support. This could be accommodation provided by the local authority or psychological support offered by national or international NGOs. Support can also come from donors, other universities, or networks such as the **EU Temporary Relocation Platform**. This example from the University of Deusto illustrates the value of such external support.

Support for relocation programmes
Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto, Spain

The Fellowship Programme for Indigenous Leaders from Latin America at the Institute of Human Rights, University of Deusto, has received external political, financial, academic and institutional support, as well as support from the University itself. The Programme is supported by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) which first approached the University in 2000 to create a capacity building programme in Spanish. The Basque Government, recognising an opportunity to increase its international political profile, offered funding to deliver the programme, and continues to do so. In addition, the Afghan Programme, a temporary welcome programme, received political and financial support from the European Union (EU).

The Institute is a member of both regional and international networks. Locally the Institute cooperates with a network that offers support to the Basque Programme for Temporary Protection for Human Rights Defenders (sponsored by the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation). The Institute also participates in global academic networks that focus on human rights and democratisation (for example, Scholars at Risk, the Global Campus of Human Rights, and the Association of Human Rights Institutes). These networks have been crucial for the development of welcome programmes, and have provided valuable opportunities for learning and sharing good practice in developing temporary relocation schemes.

More information
'Gain endorsement at senior level' in **Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions** (pages 21 to 23). This includes examples from universities in the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) network on how they have secured support within their institutions for the relocation of persecuted academics.

How will you frame the relevance and benefits of the programme?

Any advocacy to set up an initiative to support human rights defenders should start by stressing the extraordinary work they do, and the significant mutual benefit of relocation and related programmes. While defenders gain from a period of respite, training and networking opportunities, and more, university staff and students benefit from the insights defenders can bring to core activities such as research and teaching.

Aligning a programme with core university values may also help to secure support. The UNESCO Chair working paper – **Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection** – which provided the research foundation for these Guidelines, describes how such values, often found in strategy and policy documents, as well as vision and mission statements, are central to the purpose and self-identification of universities. The core value of universities is typically academic freedom, however, key documents may also refer to other relevant priorities such as democracy, social justice, diversity and inclusion, equality, sanctuary, decolonising educational practices, internationalisation, the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights, or community engagement. The work of defenders also champions these shared values, which often have the benefit of being long-standing and therefore more enduring than the support of particular individuals in the university.

You may also be able to secure support by highlighting how the programme could contribute to university ranking or impact, enhance the university's global reputation, or provide the university with a point of difference.

It may be helpful to combine moral arguments ('this is the right thing to do') with more instrumental arguments ('here are the benefits for the university').

Framing the programme

- **University strategy**: Mission, vision, history, SDGs
- **University values**: Academic freedom, human rights, equity, social justice, democracy
- **University status**: Ranking, point of difference, global reputation, internationalisation, impact
- **University practices**: Community engagement, benefits for research and teaching

---

Starting slowly – 'stepping stones' approach

Conventional university student-facing activities – degree courses and programmes – can be used to support and host human rights defenders where programmes explicitly supporting human rights defenders are not yet possible. These are important in their own right and provide possible 'stepping stones' to connect to and communicate with the wider university and senior management.

Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP)
Mahidol University, Thailand

Since 1990, the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP) at Mahidol University, Thailand, has enrolled more than 60 students at risk and human rights defenders fleeing the military dictatorship in Myanmar on their postgraduate programmes. The IHRP also offers scholarships to defenders from Nepal, Sri Lanka and Cambodia who are unable to continue their human rights work in their own countries while studying. Funding for scholarships has been secured from a consortium of international donors.

Status, values and funding can all be important complementary 'stepping stones'. The peacebuilding work of the IHRP is recognised and supported by Mahidol University as contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the University values the role of the IHRP as a Southeast Asian regional hub for human rights and peace education and research.

Boris Nemtsov's MA in Russian Studies
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Boris Nemtsov's MA in Russian Studies was accredited by Charles University in 2023 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Programme originated from cooperation between the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom. The Programme's objective is to create and maintain a vibrant community of alumni who can contribute to a future democratic Russia. Each year, the MA provides 30 places for students, with some scholarships available to cover tuition fees. Currently students are primarily from Russia, a number of whom are activists and journalists who fled the country to escape repression from the Russian state.

Cooperation with other European universities within the Erasmus framework, and with American universities, provides opportunities for students to study abroad or work on joint research projects with their peers, and for scholars to teach at other universities.

The 'stepping stones' here include a university-foundation partnership, foundation funding, a successful MA programme and the potential of the Programme to build international collaborations.

Journalist and human rights defender, Kenya

What strategies can promote institutional buy-in and support for the programme across the wider university?

Universities currently engaged in hosting have used a variety of strategies to increase the visibility of their hosting programmes within their institutions. It is also the case that some programmes do not seek high visibility, either within the university or externally. Approaches to visibility, both for the programme and individual defenders, need to be context specific.

Where possible, working with existing initiatives and procedures is advisable. Integrating the defenders into teaching and research is perhaps the main way of making such a scheme visible. Pitching the argument that defenders enhance excellence in teaching and research, and help to diversify the forms of knowledge recognised and showcased, enables universities to support such a scheme in terms that are familiar to them. Trying to align with established procedures – visas, accommodation, funding, etc. – can make buy-in easier, whether the scheme seeks visibility or not.

It may also be helpful to look beyond the 'usual suspects' and approaches. University staff can be involved in defender selection processes; the press office and communications teams may be able to improve visibility of the programme; library staff may have access to materials and archives that can help to make the case for a programme; and so on.

On many support programmes, human rights defenders give presentations about their work and take part in public events, although this may not be possible if relocated defenders require privacy or anonymity.

Examples from the Universities of Ottawa, the Philippines and York provide useful insights into building wider institutional support for programmes.

Scholars at Risk Program
University of Ottawa, Canada

Institutional buy-in for the **Scholars at Risk uOttawa Program** has been facilitated since its inception as an initiative under the Provost Office and then under the Vice-President Research Office. It is managed by the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, a unit with existing linkages to several faculties.

A **Multi-Sector Committee** was established after the creation of the Program with academics, graduate students and other staff represented. To encourage further support from faculty members, the Association of University of Ottawa Professors was invited to name a representative to join the Committee. The Committee works mainly on recruitment/selection of scholars to host, and on welcoming the scholars and their families (assisting with settling in Ottawa), but also helps with promotion of the Program and fundraising.

By **'cultivating ambassadors'** in different faculties and at different levels it is possible to explore placements in departments and research units, and offer success stories that serve as models for departments that have not previously participated in the Program. In addition, contact is made with the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute and the uOttawa Library to provide services for the scholars. All these initiatives increase awareness for the Program across campus.

A Sanctuary for National Minorities (Manilakbayan)
University of the Philippines

Manilakbayan is a journey by national minorities from different regions in the Philippines to Manila. It is a form of resistance against displacement, harassment, closure of indigenous schools, destruction of the environment, and the need to reclaim ancestral lands. Each year, during their journey, the University of the Philippines (UP) becomes a temporary sanctuary and a site of collective protection for around 100 people.

An **ad hoc Planning Committee** is formed prior to the arrival of the delegates. It is multi-sectoral in nature, composed mainly of representatives from the student community, university staff, unions, and people's organisations outside the University. The Planning Committee coordinates with the UP administration to secure institutional support and creates a campaign plan with clear objectives, focusing on the role of the University as a bastion of academic freedom and human rights. The Committee sends a letter to the Office of the Chancellor for a formal dialogue and requests senior level institutional support for the hosting. The Planning Committee also initiates the formation of **multi-sectoral subcommittees** that are responsible for meeting the everyday needs of the national minorities, determining where they will stay, sustaining food, ensuring safety, transportation, and planning their interaction with academics, students, and other employees of the University.

Sending of invitations to local colleges, creating visual aids, using social media, and room to room campaigns are some of the strategies undertaken to make the constituents of the University aware of the hosting. In terms of both funding and non-monetary aid, the organisers solicit support from the administration, different sectors within the University, people's organisations, and conduct fund-raising activities, like benefit concerts and other income generating projects. All work is done collectively and voluntarily.

David Kato College
University of York, UK

At the University of York, a new college was named in honour of the life and legacy of **David Kato**, a former fellow on the University's Protective Fellowship Programme who was murdered in 2011. David, a Ugandan human rights defender and gay rights activist, campaigned for the fundamental rights of the LGBT+ community in Uganda to be free from persecution and protected by law.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that the naming of the **David Kato College** reflected the University's belief in equality, diversity and inclusion. The University also stated: 'As a University of Sanctuary, we are proud to honour his life and legacy by naming our newest college in his memory'.

Since its opening, the college has provided accommodation for human rights defenders on the York temporary relocation programme.

More information
Examples of how hosting relocated scholars has benefited students and teaching can be found in a blog on **Hosting at Whitman College** (Washington, US).

What concerns might your university have, and how will you mitigate them?

Universities may have concerns that supporting international human rights defenders poses a political or reputational risk, or there may be apprehension about financial sustainability (**See section on Funding on page 22**). You can begin to address these concerns by holding discussions with key stakeholders in the early stages of the process, and also as the programme continues to evolve.

Managing political risk

- **Evolve/manage levels of risk**: For example, start by hosting human rights defenders working in lower risk contexts and manage the risk levels if hosting groups of defenders i.e. make sure cohorts contain both contain both low and high risk defenders. If tensions rise in the university about the scheme, revert to hosting less high risk individuals for a period.

- **Share the risk**: Are there ways in which the risk can be shared, either within the university or with external partners? For example, could human rights defenders that might be considered 'risky' by one university be referred to another where the risk might be assessed differently?

- **Communicate about risk**: For example, make it clear that asylum claims are not the aim of the scheme, but may occur over time.

(See also the discussion of risk in the **Programme Criteria** section on page 28)

Private universities

The political and financial priorities of private universities are not always compatible with the traditional values of higher education and may also deter them from supporting human rights defenders. However, private universities can also have greater freedom and flexibility, which they can leverage to support social justice and the protection of activists. For example, Jesuit universities in Latin America have a longstanding tradition of social responsibility and of providing shelter to those at risk, and often have strong social justice and human rights programmes. In recent times, the Network of Jesuit Universities in Latin America has drawn attention to violations of human rights and academic freedom in **Nicaragua and Venezuela**, as well as offering direct economic support to universities in both countries. Jesuit universities in El Salvador and Guatemala have hosted staff and students from the University of Central America in Nicaragua since it was seized by the Nicaraguan government, and Jesuit universities in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru have hosted academics from Venezuela.

More information

Section on raising awareness of hosting programmes in CARA's **Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions** (pages 42 to 45).

'Building support: events and other activities' in SAR's **How to host – A handbook for higher education partners** (page 10).

Funding the programme

Support for hosting human rights defenders is attractive to a range of funders, from university alumni to foundations, who value the extraordinary work the defenders do. There are also a variety of ways in which such support can be offered. Donors can fund visiting fellowships, residencies, temporary relocation schemes, or scholarships, for example; they can focus their funding on particular categories of defender or certain parts of the world. In short, protecting activists to enable them to do their vital work is a space in which many donors are active.

> " *I regard the human rights activists as being on the front line of the effort to create a world where we can all live in dignity, equality, respect and peace. Donating money to support them spending time on a protective fellowship scheme is both a morally urgent imperative and an act of self-interest. What they do protects us all.*
>
> **University alumni donor**

This section outlines the costs to factor in when budgeting for a programme, as well as how support from the university, external organisations, and volunteers could mitigate some of these expenses. Examples are provided of how current programmes have been costed, and also funded, and the importance of budgeting for sufficient staff time is emphasised.

How much does relocation cost?

Funding is likely to be required for accommodation, living costs, health insurance, travel, visas, and wellbeing support, as well as for staff to manage the programme. There may also be programme costs, for example external training courses and support for advocacy and networking.

Some programmes choose to provide financial support for participants' family members and / or other dependants, either by increasing a participant's monthly stipend to support them at home or by covering the costs of relocating family members with the defender.

Some estimates of direct costs are provided below (these costs were provided in 2024 and are exclusive of staff costs):

University of Ottawa – 12 months – CAD $70,000 / USD $51,500

Fellows are offered a stipend of $70,000 (Canadian dollars) to cover all their costs and are free to allocate this sum as they please. In addition, the University funds:

- Mandatory work permit costs and labour market impact assessment (<$800)

- A laptop if required

- Welcome package (winter clothes, modest household items if unable to rent furnished accommodation, etc.)

Travel to Canada and costs incurred in securing a visa are covered by institutions involved in arranging the hosting agreement, like Scholars at Risk or the Scholars Rescue Fund. In-kind support is also provided and can include access and training to use library resources, IT services, language courses in English or French, and desk space.

University of York – 6 months (no dependants) – £16,002 / $20,885				
Item	**Cost**	**x**	**Total (GBP)**	**Total (USD)**
Visa	£350	1	£350	$460
Visa application costs inc travel*	£500	1	£500	$650
Flight (including return)	£1,000	1	£1,000	$1,300
Train to / from airport	£75	2	£150	$200
Insurance	£380	1	£380	$500
Arrival expenses	£200	1	£200	$260
Rent (weekly) including utilities**	£189	28	£5,292	$6,910
Stipend (weekly)	£200	28	£5,600	$7,310
Cleaning / laundry	£100	1	£100	$130
Social dinners, farewell gift	£80	1	£80	$105
Counselling	£50	8	£400	$520
Wellbeing, including retreat	£450	1	£450	$590
Advocacy, training, networking	£1,000	1	£1,000	$1,300
English Lessons	£25	20	£500	$650
Total			**£16,002**	**$20,885**

* includes TB medical check, consulate registration, travel for visa application **campus accommodation

University of the Western Cape – 3 months – ZAR 170,800 / $9,575				
Item	**Cost**	**x**	**Total ZAR**	**Total USD**
Costs associated with visa application	R5000	2	10000	$560
Flight (including return)	R20000	1	20000	$1,120
Uber to/from the airport	R400	2	800	$45
Insurance	R5000	1	5000	$280
Welcome package (groceries, toiletries and gift)	R3000	1	3000	$170
Rent (monthly, Airbnb)	R15000	3	45000	$2,520
Stipend (monthly)	R12000	3	36000	$2,020
Social dinners	R8000	1	8000	$450
Counselling	R1000	3	3000	$170
Wellbeing, including retreat	R2000	2	4000	$225
Field trips	R3000	2	6000	$335
Resilience and personal self-care, training, networking	R5000	2	10000	$560
Incidental expenses	R20000	1	20000	$1,120
Total			**ZAR 170,800**	**$9,675**

What funding model will you follow? Where will the funding come from?

Programmes may be funded by philanthropic donors, foundations, national governments or local authorities, charitable organisations, individual donors such as alumni, or by a combination of sources. Programmes may also be funded by the university itself, from core funding, donations, or through a contribution from international student fees. Emergency funding is in some cases available from the **European Commission**, from religious institutions, and from certain NGOs.

Universities will have different priorities and values, and as a result may consider some funding sources to be inappropriate for their programme, for example oil companies or certain states.

Examples of funding models

- Local government
- National government
- Large foundation
- University-led fundraising with support of a benefactor or alumni
- University-based funding from faculty or departmental budgets
- Fundraising and contributions from unions, staff and students
- Development agencies
- National Human Rights Institutions

Funding sustainability and managing funding transitions

The Protective Fellowship Scheme for human rights defenders at risk at the University of York was initially funded by a large foundation grant. Over a 15-year period the scheme moved to a mixed funding model, including support from the University, university alumni, NGOs, and foundations. Some lessons learnt from this process include:

- Use the time provided by initial support, such as a foundation grant, to diversify sources of funding.

- Anticipate and try to manage transitions in funding to prevent the scheme having to dramatically reduce the number of defenders hosted or having to stop the scheme altogether.

- Develop a diverse portfolio of funders as this not only makes the scheme more sustainable, but diversity is also attractive to new funders.

- Optimise university-specific forms of funding (departmental or faculty budgets, alumni support) to embed the programme within the university, and as it helps to secure external assistance.

- Build longer-term commitments to ensure programme sustainability (**see Alumni Funding on page 26**). Having to secure funding each year for the next year is very costly in terms of financial and human resources, whereas multi-year commitments allow more time to run the programme.

- Secure relationships with funders that ensure 'holistic' funding. 'Holistic' funding includes funding for the programme but also for staffing and family support.

Scholars and Practitioners at Risk Program
The University of Connecticut (UConn)

The Scholars and Practitioners at Risk Program is part-funded by philanthropic donor support, including by alumni. Paired with support from the University, UConn is able to fund one to two fellows per year for up to a two-year residency. When possible, UConn secures additional resources from other NGOs supporting short-term residencies so that more than one fellow can be hosted at the same time.

What costs is the university prepared to cover?

As noted above, the support offered by the host university can be key to securing funding from external sources as it demonstrates the university's commitment to the programme. Universities may be willing to provide some of the funding required for the costs of relocation or for staff time.

Most universities are likely to offer in-kind support such as library and IT services, and desk space. Indeed, the range of facilities and resources universities can make available to those registered at the institution is one of the advantages of universities as hosts of human rights defenders.

SUPPORT FOR THE VISA PROCESS
ACCOMMODATION ON CAMPUS
ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY CLASSES AND TRAINING
MENTORING BY ACADEMIC STAFF
LIBRARY AND IT SERVICES
STAFFING COSTS   LANGUAGE TRAINING
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND WELLBEING SUPPORT
FUNDS FOR NETWORKING OR CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

What steps will the university take to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of the programme?

Some universities have philanthropic departments that may be willing to cultivate relationships and partnerships with alumni, external organisations, and donors, and to take responsibility for some funding applications. The International Office of a university can also often be helpful. Alternatively, some universities have set up dedicated fundraising teams to take on the specific and targeted role of sourcing financial support for relocation. In short, it is important to locate and work with relevant departments within the university which support fundraising.

> **Alumni funding**
>
> The **University of York**'s Protective Fellowship Programme is part-funded by donations from alumni. Programme staff, with the assistance of the University's philanthropy department, have worked with one of these donors to develop a more sustainable funding arrangement. Instead of an annual donation for two fellowships, the alumnus has now agreed to a three-year commitment for two fellows per year plus some staff costs.

More information

Examples of support that the university may be willing to provide, or that could be accessed in the wider community, are listed in CARA's **Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions** (page 49).

'Find means and resources' in **How to set up a Shelter City** by Justice and Peace Netherlands (pages 11 to 12).

Staffing the programme

Working for a support programme for human rights defenders can be challenging, but also enormously rewarding and fulfilling. Many schemes have a coordinator or similar role which is a unique position within any university, as it forms a bridge between the university and civil society globally and manages the day-to-day support for human rights defenders. It is also a post that requires a particular skill set.

> *When universities protect human rights defenders they give them unlimited options for growth and, sometimes, a different space from which to defend human rights and democracy. When I left activism some years back, I was completely drained. I didn't want to be a human rights defender again, I was burnt out! Eventually, I found my way back to university, still wanting nothing to do with being an activist. I thought of the university as a place for further disengagement, at least emotionally, from my activist work. However, in light of the shrinking democratic spaces and threatened freedoms, including those of academics, I inevitably found myself working on human rights again. But this time from a university, hosting defenders and doing other work to protect those who struggle to defend human rights and democracy in Africa.*
>
> **Mmeli Dube**, Programme Lead, African Universities Hub for Human Rights (AUH), University of the Western Cape

Running a programme is resource intensive and core staffing needs should not be underestimated or undervalued. Funding proposals should reflect the time and effort required to undertake this work, and be transparent about the resources needed to run programmes effectively.

Schemes may need full-time or part-time core staff, or both, and perhaps additional staff input at key times. How many staff you need will depend on the number of people on the programme as well as how much support you can rely on, for example from academic staff who might take a mentoring or similar role, and other staff and services in the university e.g. human resources, fundraising, finance, legal, counselling.

Pressures on programme staff can also be eased by enlisting the help of community and civil society organisations, and volunteers. Examples of how a local NGO provides social support to the University of Deusto, and of how volunteers have set up a 'Friends Scheme' at the University of York, are outlined later in the Guidelines in the section on **Social Support (pages 49 to 51)**.

Importantly, support for the staff administering the programme and any volunteers assisting with defenders should be provided. The **Barcelona Guidelines** on wellbeing and temporary relocation emphasise that staff working on relocation programmes may suffer in terms of their own wellbeing.

Finally, the work of programme staff should be recognised as a unique and sometimes challenging contribution to the university through appropriate pay, training, psycho-social support and commendation.

More information
'Allocate responsibility for managing provision of practical support' and 'Map existing support for refugee and at-risk academics' in CARA's **Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions** (pages 24 to 29).

Programme criteria

When designing the programme, universities will need to determine the criteria which will shape the nature and scope of the programme e.g. the purpose of the scheme, the type of human rights defender or activist to be hosted, the duration of the hosting, and the number of placements the programme is able to support. Whether the university is the main host or playing a supporting role, it will need to be agreed which department or centre is taking the lead.

Relocation may be for as little as two weeks or as long as two years, for an individual or for a cohort of ten or more. **How many human rights defenders** you are able to host, and the **duration of the relocation**, will depend largely on the budget you have available. Workload might influence the duration of placements as the amount of work involved (finding accommodation, organising finances, visas, etc.) can make longer fellowships more manageable. The duration of the placement may depend on the visa issued e.g. tourist visas usually only allow shorter stays. The length of the visa could also be dependent on the country the defender comes from.

Where in the university will the programme be hosted, or where will support be provided?

Host institutions should consider which department, school or centre is best placed to take responsibility for the programme, and why. Existing programmes are most commonly located in centres.

Centres as hosts

Schemes to support human rights defenders are often hosted by centres within universities, rather than departments. Centres are frequently interdisciplinary and can have a sectoral focus on issues such as human rights, social justice, international development, environmental justice, and so on. This 'in-betweenness' extends beyond interdisciplinarity to a less embedded status within university procedures and bureaucracies (**see the earlier University of the Western Cape entry, describing the Research Group designation as a regulatory 'grey zone' on page 13**).

As a result, centres can be more nimble and flexible. Some centres see themselves as a kind of 'NGO within the university' and operate with a specific mandate to lead on community engagement and activist agendas. Larger departments and faculties, where it is harder to generate consensus on politically charged issues, may consciously or unconsciously delegate such activity to a centre. As a result, entities such as centres are likely to be the entry point linking universities on the one hand and civil society and human rights defenders on the other.

It should also be noted that the status of centres brings certain vulnerabilities, as their activities may not be understood by departments and the wider university, and may require repeated negotiation and justification.

Will the university be a partner, rather than the main host?

The university may not be the main host but act in a supporting role instead, working with another university, a local authority, or an NGO. In such cases, the university should review what arrangements need to be made to perform its role(s) and be clear on divisions of labour among partners. The issue of where responsibility resides within the university (see above), still applies. Whether acting as the main hosting organisation or as a partner, universities may wish to become part of a wider network, such as the **European Union Temporary Relocation Platform**.

Universities can play a diverse set of secondary roles, including writing letters of support e.g. for visas, and providing a 'neutral space' for defenders to meet. Some of the more common support functions are described below.

Examples of support roles universities can perform

- **Providing training and courses**
  - Participation in human rights law and political science programmes available to human rights defenders on the Shelter City programme (University College Roosevelt, University College Groningen, and Windesheim College, Netherlands).
  - Classes at the School of Cultural Peace for those relocated via the Catalan Asylum Action Committee (Autonomous University of Barcelona).
  - Defenders on the temporary relocation programme Oslo Breathing Space City are able to attend classes at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (University of Oslo).
- **Visas**
  - Prospective participants in the **ICORN** relocation programme, which provides protective residencies for writers, journalists and artists facing persecution, are enrolled in university courses to allow them to meet the conditions for obtaining a visa. They also then participate in lectures and workshops (Vrije Universiteit Brussels).
- **Security**
  - Universities may play an unofficial role in temporary relocation, for example by providing a temporary place of safety for human rights defenders and activists in danger, or by arranging relocation to a more secure part of the country for social leaders at risk (Jesuit universities in Latin America).

Who is the programme for?

When setting up a programme, universities need to establish who the programme is for. If it is broadly for human rights defenders, how is this term defined?

Who is a human rights defender?

The **Declaration on Human Rights Defenders** defines human rights defenders as 'individuals or groups who act to prompt, protect or strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means'. **Human rights defenders** may be teachers, journalists, lawyers, public prosecutors, representatives of indigenous organisations, members of social movements and community organisations, development workers, unionists, or staff of human rights organisations. The term has a wide application, including anyone who carries out an act that defends a human right. This may be professionally or in a voluntary capacity.

Professional activists or grassroots defenders?

You will need to consider whether your programme is better suited to professional activists or if you wish to support grassroots defenders, or both. If you offer places to grassroots activists, how will you support their work within a university context?

Professional activists usually have paid employment in the field, and often have high levels of formal education and training in human rights. Typical examples of professional activists are journalists, lawyers, UN staff, and those that manage or work for NGOs.

Grassroots defenders are local activists, members of movements or communities, and are often closely connected to the issue they work on through lived experience. Their work takes a 'bottom-up' approach, and may use a more political – rather than legal – human rights framing.

Leaders or potential leaders?

A further set of questions relate to whether leadership – actual or potential – is an important criterion? Will you require applicants to have a certain level of seniority or number of years of experience? How might it affect a person's application if they have already had extensive international opportunities or little/no such exposure?

Regional and / or thematic schemes?

Whilst some relocation programmes are open to all defenders from all regions, others focus on a specific type of defender, such as environmental defenders or student activists, or human rights defenders from a particular region or country.

Examples of specialist schemes

- Indigenous human rights defenders – University of Deusto, Spain
- Democracy and anti-corruption defenders from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras – George Mason University, USA
- Journalists – Oxford University, UK
- Human rights defenders from Colombia – University of Burgos, Spain
- Activists from former Soviet states – American University of Central Asia
- Student activists – Student at Risk Programme (StAR), Norway

Is risk a requirement?

University programmes for human rights defenders often offer rest and respite for those who are threatened or at risk. If the programme specifically targets defenders who are at risk, how will you define risk – public / private, short-term / long-term, physical / psychological / administrative / legal / financial? To begin with, new programmes might choose low risk people until the scheme is established. Protection providers may decide to work with a continuum of risk, balancing higher and lower risk people as time passes or within cohorts of human rights defenders. How risk may alter, and how it can be mitigated, during the fellowship itself is covered in the next section of these Guidelines (pages 52 to 53).

Some programmes do not accept applicants who are living in a third country where they are safe, or who have been out of their country of origin for a certain number of years.

What qualifications and language skills are needed?

Requirements for academic qualifications and fluency in the host language also need to be taken into consideration. You may decide no formal qualifications are necessary and instead recognise different forms of knowledge. However, in some cases a minimum level of qualifications may be mandatory for the visa category you are using. For example, academic qualifications would not be necessary if entering on a tourist visa, but would be required for those entering the country on a research visa.

> ## Criteria to consider
>
> - How to define human rights defender / type of human rights work
> - Level of risk
> - Professional or grassroots, or both
> - Leadership role / potential
> - Previous support / training / international exposure
> - Qualifications / educational background
> - Desire to learn, teach, research
> - Need for research capacity building
> - Language(s)
> - Legal status and ability to return to country of origin, or to a third country
> - Potential value the university can add, and vice versa, for example how the applicant can add to teaching and research
> - Commitment to continue human rights work after the programme
> - Potential impact of human rights work
> - Innovation in human rights work
> - Contribution to diversity of the programme
>
> **Please note:** no programme will apply all, or even most, of these criteria, and the list is not intended to be in priority order. Schemes should select criteria from this list and beyond that best fit their needs and priorities.

More information
'Define the target group, purpose and features of Shelter City' in **How to set up a Shelter City** by Justice and Peace Netherlands (pages 9 to 10).

Will the programme support participants' families or other dependants?

If protection and support for human rights defenders is to be 'holistic', then in many cases it must include families and dependants. If defenders are content that their families / dependants are secure they are much more likely to benefit to the full from the programme. Women defenders, in particular, may not be able to participate in a protection scheme if they cannot bring family members with them.

> *If I wouldn't be able to bring my kids and my husband... it would mean that for me it wouldn't be possible to decide to have this...* cause I will be mad thinking about what may happen to my kids, what may happen to my husband. *That's why for me it was an only option... and from another side, having a family around you, it's a moral support to you.*
>
> **Human rights defender**, Azerbaijan

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER HUB
POLICY BRIEF 4 | APRIL 2018

UNIVERSITY of York

Families and Loved Ones in the Security and Protection of Defenders at Risk

Relocation programmes differ as to whether and how they support the families and other dependants of participants. Some schemes provide an increased stipend to cover the cost of supporting family members in the country of origin, either paid to all participants regardless of circumstances or offered only to those with dependants. Others fund the relocation of family members to the host country along with the human rights defender. The family support offered may impact the overall number of defenders hosted, or reduce the length of the fellowship. Examples of how universities and other relocation providers fund dependants are summarised on the next page.

Where family members are relocated with defenders a number of considerations need to be kept in mind. These include cost, accommodation, language support and the need to arrange school or college places, or find childcare facilities.

Support for families and dependants

Some relocation programmes do not explicitly support participants' families and / or dependants, instead expecting those on their programme to provide this support through the stipend they receive. Nevertheless, research has identified the importance of **including defenders' families and loved ones in protection measures**, and many schemes are reviewing how they can provide such support. While discussions about what constitutes good practice in this regard is ongoing among protection providers, some examples currently in place are:

- Providing additional funding for defenders with families

- Providing a stipend that allows for support of family members to all defenders

- Supporting relocation of family with defender

- Funding for school tuition fees (at home)

- Emergency fund for family-related issues, such as medical expenses

- Offering resettlement grants when defenders return home

Among the questions to address when deciding whether and how to support families and dependants are the following:

- Are some categories of defender discouraged from applying / discriminated against because of the lack of family support e.g. women, care providers?

- How is family defined (nuclear, extended), and if dependants are included, how is this category defined?

- How can fairness be ensured within cohorts of defenders with different personal circumstances e.g. is a higher amount of funding for all fairer than top ups for particular defenders?

- If additional funding for family / dependant support has to be applied for by defenders, what are the criteria and how will the process be handled?

Applications for some additional funding to support families, either to relocate or when remaining in the country of origin, can be made to organisations such as the **European Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP)** and other **grant makers** listed on the EUTRP website.

A human rights defender from Kazakhstan spent six months on a relocation programme along with her teenage daughter. Below, she explains how her daughter benefited from the relocation experience and became a human rights defender.

> *She went to lots of meetings... and after that she understood the specifics of our human rights work. It's not easy. It's difficult. And she, as a youth... she created the Children's Committee of Human Rights... And (she) collected more than 40 different children from different regions of Kazakhstan, and every month they provided different events... many public lectures... So they talked with a professor from Mexico, defenders from India, Ethiopia, Palestine, France, Kyrgyzstan... human rights defenders from more than 10 countries. They talked about the wars in different countries, for example... about children's rights, women's rights, children with disabilities...*

Minority rights defender and
gender activist, Myanmar

Selection process

Before the selection process can begin, you will need to determine how you will find your candidates for relocation. Other considerations are the application process itself, whether a formal nomination or referral is necessary, and what documents candidates will need to submit.

The selection process should also be clearly set out and documented. For example, will you shortlist candidates who will then be interviewed by a selection committee, and if so, who should be part of this selection committee, and against what criteria will they select candidates? Clarifying these processes and the associated timeframes will help you decide when the selection process will need to commence.

ADVERTISE PROGRAMME / CALL FOR NOMINATIONS	→	SELECTION PROCESS	→	APPLY FOR VISAS AND BOOK TRAVEL	→	ARRIVAL

How and when will you begin the selection process?

Timeframe

A key first question in the selection process is when it needs to begin. Once you have specified all the key processes (e.g. dissemination, nomination and selection) and estimated how long they will take, you can then work backwards from the expected date of arrival to establish the date when you need to start advertising the programme. It might be useful to time the arrival of applicants with the beginning of the academic year, or there may be other programmes within the host institution or country that the programme should coincide with.

The time required for the visa application process will need to be factored in and institutions should be prepared to be flexible, with some visas taking longer to secure than others e.g. a student or research visa versus a tourist visa. There may be university procedures that need to be followed too, for example a number of documents must be submitted and approved before a UK university can issue the certificate of sponsorship required for a research visa.

The time between the call for applications going out and the arrival of defenders at the host university is likely to be at least three months, although in many cases it will be much longer.

Dissemination

The selection process begins with dissemination: how will you let people know that they can apply to your programme? If you have decided to include grassroots defenders, how will you reach them? Do you have channels that allow you direct access to potential candidates or are there gatekeeping issues you might need to address? Will you decide to follow a closed, restricted or open process? Snowballing, with partners referring the call to their partners and so on, is one way to increase your reach. Another option is to have a targeted programme, focusing on specific regions, issues or categories of human rights defender. In making these decisions, it can be difficult to ensure a balance between a good-sized pool of candidates and being overwhelmed with applications. Just disseminating your call through trusted partners may be the best way to start a programme.

Nomination

The question of who can nominate candidates is also crucial. Some programmes allow candidates to self-refer whilst others require candidates to be nominated by someone else. If you choose the latter model, who is eligible to nominate potential participants? The nominator could be the defender's own employer or a third party. It might be INGOs, NGOs, social movements, community organisations, trade unions, embassies, former fellows, etc., either within your own network or more broadly. When seeking nominations through such networks, programme staff should bear in mind that they may be using the same networks for dissemination as other universities/relocation providers, thereby narrowing new ground covered by the call for applications and potentially reinforcing inequalities and patterns of exclusion among defenders.

You may decide certain entities are not eligible to be nominators for your programme, for example political parties. In some contexts, embassies may be suitable nominators, but not in others.

Selection process
Human Rights Defenders Relocation Programme, University of the Western Cape

The African Universities Hub for Human Rights (AUH), at the University of the Western Cape, set up a Protective Fellowship Programme (PFP) for at-risk human rights defenders (HRDs) in 2024. The Programme aims to embed HRDs in the academic community for their safety, rest and respite, engagement in collaborative research, training, and networking opportunities. It also facilitates human rights defender interaction with the broader Cape Town civil society thus enhancing networks and wellbeing.

The relocation is held from September to November, coinciding with the final teaching term of the year. The selection process for the first cohort was done through a limited call for nominations, however, in subsequent years AUH plans to openly advertise the Programme. For the first cohort, organisations, universities and individuals working on protecting human rights defenders and human rights in the African continent, and drawn from the AUH's growing network, were requested to nominate defenders needing rest and respite. AUH provides guidance for the nominating organisations and nominees.

Nominees are shortlisted by AUH staff and interviewed and selected by a panel comprising at least one member of the Advisory Group and two staff members. The Advisory Group includes UWC's Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Development and Support, and two members from outside UWC: an academic with extensive experience in running university-based temporary relocation schemes and an activist-scholar. Shortlisted participants are notified of the outcome of their applications at least two months before the commencement of the Programme. Once at UWC, defenders are treated as Visiting Fellows hosted by the Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG) and the Political Studies Department. This distinguishes them from students who must meet specific requirements for admission.

Supporting documents

The outline of your selection process could also include what documents candidates will be required to submit as part of their application, and how – guidance should be provided in straight-forward language and communication should be via secure digital media from the outset. In addition to an application form or personal statement, some programmes request nomination or referral documentation from third parties to provide a full picture of the applicant's background and ensure their suitability and fit. It is important to consider both the need for comprehensive documentation to ensure the credibility of human rights defenders, and also that the process does not overburden applicants who are often working in stressful situations or impact on their security. The University of Dundee case study later in this section provides an example of how processes can be rationalised.

Possible application documents

- Application form
- Personal statement
- Nomination form
- Work record
- References
- Copy of passport
- Risk statement

Some programmes request copies of passports at the application stage. Where an applicant does not have a valid passport, more support might be needed and greater time should be allowed when estimating arrival dates, even more so if the candidate applying for a new passport is outside of their country of origin. In addition, programmes may be required to ask for information on criminal records, political affiliations, or participation in violence or human rights violations at this stage. This may appear invasive and whilst in some scenarios it will be unnecessary, in others it might be required for visa applications and other bureaucratic processes and can also prevent problems later on. Such information will not necessarily exclude candidates, however, some countries will not grant visas to those convicted of certain offences, such as terrorism, even if these charges are false.

Selection documentation
Practitioners at Risk

In line with Scholars at Risk's (SAR) **general placement criteria** for scholars, SAR requests the following materials and information to evaluate eligibility for the Practitioners at Risk program:

- Passport (or other official national ID) copy.

- Updated CV/professional resume.

- A statement of purpose to understand what type of work/project an applicant would seek to undertake at a SAR member university.

- Two recent work samples.

- Any available language test scores (the majority of SAR placements are at English-speaking institutions; other languages of the network including French and German are considered as well).

- Two professional letters of recommendation.

- Risk statement.*

- Any available risk corroboration (e.g. court documents, police reports, media articles that confirm an applicant's situation, or other documents that an applicant believes may assist SAR in understanding the threats experienced).

- Applicants are asked if they have ever been convicted of a crime. SAR is aware that practitioners may be wrongfully accused of crimes in their countries of origin, and because of this an applicant answering 'yes' to this question would not be precluded from being considered for SAR assistance. If a practitioner has been wrongfully convicted of a crime, it is good for SAR to know early on as questions around convictions may come up in a visa process.

- In accordance with our values as a network, applicants are also asked if they have participated in violence or human rights abuses against any individual and/or group.

- Information about citizenship/residency in other countries; applicants with citizenship or permanent residency in a safe third country are not eligible (for example, dual nationals with one nationality in a country where they would not be targeted/at risk).

*SAR defines qualifying risk as:

- Threats to a candidate's life, liberty, physical well-being, or academic/professional career, in violation of internationally recognised human rights standards.

- Experienced currently or, for those forced to leave their country because of risk, within five years.

- Lack of citizenship, permanent residency, or similar protected status in a safe country.

Streamlining and supporting the selection process
Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee

The Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship (SHRDF) was established in 2018 as an initiative of the Scottish Government, hosted by the University of Dundee. A consortium of protection organisations, national civil society organisations and universities came together to develop the Fellowship, and this Steering Committee continues to act as the recruitment mechanism for the Fellows.

Former Fellows are able to nominate, and the Programme actively seeks out specialist organisations working on its current thematic priority areas (LGBTQ+, indigenous and grassroots defenders in 2024).

To improve accessibility and to streamline the process, since 2024, it has been possible for nominating organisations to submit an application without asking the defenders to do a personal statement. Personal statements are only required if an applicant is shortlisted.

Funding from the Scottish Government has allowed psychosocial support to be offered to all defenders shortlisted (up to three times the number of placements available). Applicants also have the opportunity to attend informal drop-in sessions with Programme staff and psychologists in order to make the interview process less intimidating, and unsuccessful applicants are provided with referrals to alternative programmes or suggestions of external funding sources if they still wish to relocate with the SHRDF.

How will you choose candidates?

A typical process for selecting candidates is to review and shortlist applications against selection criteria, and then interview. A list of interview questions should be prepared in advance. These will need to try to avoid any issues that may be retraumatising. As interviews are likely to take place remotely (i.e. via zoom or similar) you should think about online security concerns and how you will verify the identity of the candidate, for example by comparing a copy of their ID to the person you are video interviewing.

Selection panels

A key part of establishing the selection process is determining who will be involved in the selection process and what role they will have. For example, will programme staff prepare a list of candidates for a selection committee, advisory board or other similar body to review, shortlist and interview? Who will make the final decision, programme staff or the selection committee?

If you decide to have a selection committee, who should the members be? Some existing programmes have boards or committees that include university staff, community representatives, experts from NGOs, and human rights defenders. Others prefer to restrict membership of these bodies to those within the university, in which case it may at times be necessary to draw on the expertise of external actors where there are applications from countries or contexts unfamiliar to programme staff. Selection criteria for membership of the board or committee and terms of reference may be helpful, in particular to clarify where the power of decision-making lies.

Applying the selection criteria

During the selection process, the criteria agreed on when setting up the programme will be applied to applications (**see Criteria to Consider, page 31**). Some programmes use a points-based approach in which applications are reviewed and scored against criteria to strive for greater objectivity. Others take a more qualitative and subjective approach.

Selection process – balancing criteria
Protective Fellowship Scheme, University of York

The main criterion for selection to the University of York programme is risk. Secondary criteria include the capacity to speak some English, and to benefit from and contribute to a university setting. Sometimes 'fit' with expertise within the Centre and the wider university are also taken into account.

Selection prioritises external-facing criteria, relating to the circumstances of the human rights defender, but complements them with internal-facing criteria, which look at issues such as 'fit' and capacities. Within cohorts and across years, the programme looks to achieve balance and diversity, in relation to risk-levels, gender, and geographical reach and coverage. In a given intake, having some who are at high risk and/or are grassroots activists in need of additional support may be sustainable, but an entire cohort composed of either group is unlikely to be.

The Centre has found that it is important to keep selection criteria under review to understand hidden or unintended biases, and also to regularly review for regions or categories of defender not being reached.

More information
'Selecting and inviting a scholar' in SAR's **How to host – A handbook for higher education partners** (pages 13 to 20).

Human rights defenders attending the African Universities Hub for Human Rights summer school at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa

SECTION TWO – RUNNING THE PROGRAMME

This section of the Guidelines will cover the key aspects of running relocation programmes. It begins with an overview of the practical tasks to be completed in the lead up to arrival. The main sub-section discusses the running of the programme during the human rights defenders' stay, in particular wellbeing and social support, research, teaching and training, and networking and advocacy.

Preparing for arrival

In the lead up to the arrival of participants in your programme, there are a number of key tasks to complete. Travel and visas need to be organised, accommodation found, plans made to support dependants in some cases, and needs assessments carried out. It will be important to have a plan for arrival, and importantly it should be clear who is responsible for the work.

Visas and travel

Most participants in relocation programmes will need a visa before they can travel to the host institution. Programmes use different visa categories, depending on their needs and context.

Types of visas used in relocation

- **Visiting researcher / postdoctoral / academic exchange**
  (may allow greater flexibility and permission to work, but requires proof of a certain level of educational qualifications that human rights defenders either may not have, or cannot easily provide proof of; can be expensive)

- **Student**
  (avoids tax implications)

- **Tourist**
  (easier to obtain but restricts the time a person can be in the country; working not permitted which may mean there are issues paying a stipend)

- **Humanitarian**
  (working not allowed)

The vast majority of visa applications are successful and universities have the capacity, leverage and expertise – routinely securing visas for students and staff – to secure visas where others, such as NGOs, may struggle. However, the visa process can be complex, time consuming and expensive. To ensure the process runs as smoothly as possible, universities can:

- Budget for visa costs in funding applications, including additional costs for medical checks and travel to visa interviews, possibly in another country.

- Factor in lead times and apply for visas well in advance of the start of the programme, especially if applicants have already had to leave their country of origin and are applying from a third country, or if there are no consular services available and they will have to travel out of the country to secure a visa.

- Consider making the programme available online so that it can be accessed by those delayed by visa hold ups.

- Allow staff time to support the process. Some universities have found internal departments that assist international scholars and students to be a great help.

- Work with partner NGOs that take responsibility for arranging visas. Where funding allows, specialist lawyers can assist with visa applications.

- If problems arise, embassies may be able to help.

Programme staff should make themselves aware of visa policy and wherever possible advocate that relevant national authorities exercise flexibility in visas in the case of human rights defenders. It may be helpful to engage with other protection programmes to learn and share best practices and challenges.
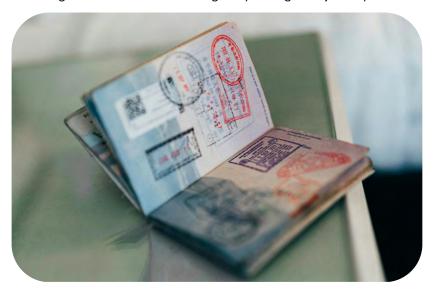
Human rights visas

Globally there are calls to introduce a visa category for human rights defenders. Protect Defenders EU, along with 50 civil society organisations, has campaigned for the European Union to introduce a **human rights visa**, with an accelerated process, that is user-friendly and available in multiple languages, and that would offer a multiple entry, long-term visa for human rights defenders facing imminent grave danger and persecution. Similarly in the United States there have been calls for a **multi-entry, multi-year visa for human rights defenders**.

A number of European countries have visa categories for human rights defenders, for example the Irish Special Humanitarian Visa System for Human Rights Defenders at Risk managed by Frontline Defenders and Spain's Temporary Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders. More information on other European countries with visa programmes for human rights defenders can be found in the 2023 report **Protecting human rights defenders at risk: EU entry, stay and support**.

Programme staff are also likely to have responsibility for organising travel to the host country, and probably travel insurance, for the programme participants. In some cases it might be necessary to complete a risk assessment before travel. Such assessments should be made in dialogue with the participant and where necessary, relevant contacts and networks, for example embassies. Strategies to mitigate risk during travel might include:

- Avoiding certain airlines.
- Avoiding routes via certain third countries.
- Using language carefully, for example a letter of support for a visa might specify 'visiting fellow' instead of 'human rights defender', or participants could be affiliated to a Law Department rather than a Human Rights Centre.
- Liaising with staff from government departments (e.g. Foreign Office and embassies) and INGO staff before defenders travel to have people on standby or even present at the airport to try and prevent any issues exiting the country, or if defenders have to change flights en route.
- Asking defenders to check in regularly during their journey.

Needs assessment

Relocation programmes might find it useful to carry out a needs assessment with participants before they arrive, either through an online interview or by asking them to complete a form, or both. This can help the programme staff prepare and anticipate any possible issues.

Needs assessments

A needs assessment could cover:

- Training
  - Human rights training
  - Law, leadership training, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, security, fundraising
  - Research training
  - Language training
  - IT training / giving presentations / using spreadsheets
- Safety and security
- Networking and advocacy
- Ongoing work commitments
- Travel plans, e.g. any conference attendance planned during relocation period
- Equipment
- Medical, including psychosocial support needs
- Needs of families / dependants
  - Travel and visas
  - Accommodation
  - Healthcare / wellbeing
  - Social support
  - Language classes
  - Nursery / school / college places

More information
'Preparing to welcome a scholar' in SAR's **How to host – A handbook for higher education partners** (pages 22 to 25).

Accommodation

Living in a new setting, perhaps with students or other human rights defenders, can be one of the major benefits of a relocation programme. Informal learning from peers is often as important, if not more important, than formal teaching and training opportunities.

University accommodation

Some universities may be willing to provide accommodation on campus which is more convenient for participants, and saves time and often money too. Living with students or other defenders may also provide an important social aspect to the participants' stay and be less isolating than housing in the community. However, university accommodation may not be suitable in all cases, for example if defenders are relocating with their families.

> *The best accommodation is inside the university, in the graduates' building. That saves you time and also makes you feel more integrated to the life-dynamics of the university and its activities.*
>
> **Human rights defender**, Nicaragua

Local authority and private accommodation

In some cases, universities have secured long-term accommodation through agreements with their local authority or have long standing arrangements with private accommodation providers. For shorter stays, it may be possible to arrange hosting with local residents. Wherever human rights defenders are accommodated, the university should ideally take responsibility for ensuring it is of a good standard.

Finding private rental properties takes up staff time, and options can be limited as accommodation providers may be reluctant to agree to short-term lets. Some universities report that racism has hindered their efforts to find accommodation for those on their programmes. It is important to be familiar with any university health and safety requirements, and to plan for the time needed to secure electricity, gas, water, wifi, taxes, etc., and in some cases furniture and utensils.

Where programmes host a group of defenders, there are advantages and disadvantages to housing them together, whether privately or in university accommodation. Living together may create tension and disagreements, but it can also help establish bonds and camaraderie and be a great source of support for defenders.

> *I think it's a good thing to be in one flat with the co-fellows... we can share our stories, our experiences, and we can also ask some recommendations from them if we have some issue. So I think it's really a good thing.*
>
> **Human rights defender**, Philippines

Living costs

Participants' living costs are usually covered by a weekly or monthly stipend, paid either in cash, onto a spending card, or into a bank account. The amount paid may be based on an equivalent salary of university staff or determined by a cost of living calculation (**see previous section on Relocation Costs, pages 22 to 23**).

Arrival

Some university programmes provide support to help defenders adjust to relocation even before arrival, for example by putting defenders who will be participating in the programme in touch with each other, or by offering language and cultural orientation programmes in the lead up to arrival. Planning for arrival itself should include thinking about who will welcome participants, often by collecting them from the train station or picking them up from the airport. Also, what will be provided on arrival? It will help defenders settle in if you provide food, toiletries, and importantly money as many defenders may not be in a position to bring any money with them. As participants are unlikely to be able to set up a bank account in advance of their arrival, you will need to provide them with enough cash to last until they are able to make other arrangements.

> *From my experience in the international programmes I have participated in, the first people I met at the airport left a lasting impression, making me feel respected and warmly welcomed. For human rights defender fellows new to the city, a thoughtful welcome at the airport or main station is essential. It sets a positive tone for their journey and integration into the university community.*

Human rights defender, Afghanistan

Once human rights defenders are settled in their accommodation, you should offer some form of orientation and induction. In addition, some providers have comprehensive handbooks with arrival information that can be sent to participants in advance so that they can familiarise themselves with life in the host country.

Welcome checklist

- Send out a pre-arrival handbook
- Arrange collection from airport / train station
- Provide the following key information:
    · Map of the city, useful apps
    · Supermarkets
    · Hospitals
- Provide university orientation:
    · Host centre or department
    · Campus tour
    · Library
    · Email address and IT and other access requirements (university ID card)
- Arrange mentoring / peer support, and provide key contact numbers
- Discuss wellbeing and psychosocial support options
- Discuss security in relation to programme and communication
- Plan for health insurance
- Provide an agenda for the first week
- Organise a welcome activity / event

Arrival procedures
Protective Fellowship Scheme, University of York

The University of York has a network of volunteers who play a key role in arrival procedures (more information on this voluntary 'Friends Scheme' is in the section on Social Support, pages 49 to 51). These volunteers meet the human rights defender at the train station, along with the Programme Coordinator who will bring enough money to cover the first few days of the stay. The Friends then take the defender to their accommodation and help them settle in, explaining how equipment works, where they can find the nearest shops, and also providing a prepared vegetarian meal. Over the next few days, the Friends help orient the defenders, showing them the city, explaining how the buses work, providing extra clothing if necessary, taking them to get a SIM card if needed, giving directions to international supermarkets and shops that stock halal food, etc. The welcoming role of the Friends is especially important if defenders arrive at the weekend when university staff are not always available to provide support.

More information
'Arrival and adjustment' in SAR's **How to host – A handbook for higher education partners** (pages 26 to 27).

Programme of activities

Relocation programmes are dynamic entities, consisting of multiple intersecting parts which themselves change over time. Sometimes it is hard to step back, and see the sum of a programme's various parts. One way of understanding such schemes is as a complex balancing act. Defenders will most likely want a combination of activity and respite, continuing work at home and making the most of new opportunities; the host will provide a mix of university-based courses and activities and externally sourced training and outreach; the programme as a whole will need to balance growth and respond to new opportunities over time without becoming unwieldy and overly cluttered with activity; and so on.

Defenders, as individuals, apply to relocation schemes because they have urgent needs – rest, recuperation, a safe space to continue their work, time out to think, certain training needs, etc. Providing affiliation and status at a university – as a fellow, or visiting scholar – can be an important source of affirmation and recognition of defenders as sources of knowledge and insight. But they are almost always part of wider collectives – organisations, movements, networks – that also require support. Means also need to be found of cascading benefits from individuals to the collectives of which they are part.
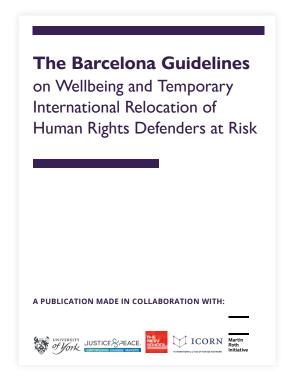
In what follows, the Guidelines address health and wellbeing; social support; safety and security; networking and advocacy; research, teaching and training; and living costs as core elements of relocation programmes.

Health and wellbeing

Because human right defenders work in stressful settings and are often threatened and under attack from powerful actors, such as the state or businesses, a key aim of the programme must be to support the wellbeing of defenders. The **Barcelona Guidelines** highlight that 'defenders may arrive on relocation programmes exhausted and struggling with mental health issues such as burnout, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder'. When putting in place measures to address this, programme coordinators should recognise that human rights defenders may have very different ways of approaching wellbeing and make sure not to presume that certain methods work for everyone.

In addition to offering psychological and wellbeing support from specially trained counsellors, either within the university, through a national healthcare provider, or via a specialist private firm, you might also want to explore whether you can offer spiritual support, arts-based remedies, sports facilities, yoga and meditation, a garden, allotment, or other outdoor space, or alternative forms of wellbeing support so that human rights defenders are able to choose what will work best for them. Links to an alumni network might also support defenders in adjusting to their relocation.

It is important to note that there will be limits to the kinds of support universities can offer or access; and that defenders are individuals with agency and resilience as well as people who need support.

The Barcelona Guidelines
on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk

A PUBLICATION MADE IN COLLABORATION WITH:

UNIVERSITY of York | JUSTICE & PEACE EMPOWERING CHANGE MAKERS | THE NEW SCHOOL | ICORN INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE NETWORK | Martin Roth Initiative

Wellbeing
Protective Fellowship Scheme, University of York

The relocation programme at the University of York aims to support the wellbeing of human rights defenders both during and after relocation. Activities include:
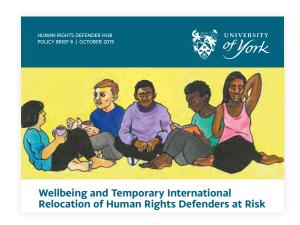
- Access to individual counselling.

- A workshop on trauma and wellbeing facilitated by **Open Briefing** for defenders and the staff working with them (focussing on recognising the various symptoms of trauma and how to best deliver Psychological First Aid).

- Psycho-educational group sessions to address mental wellbeing issues arising from human rights work, and exploring ways to relieve stress, for example through body work.

- A wellbeing 'retreat' where defenders spend three days enjoying walks in nature, a day at the coast, yoga sessions, cooking together and playing board games in the evenings. Defenders are encouraged to leave their laptops and phones behind and to enjoy a complete break from work and their busy lives.

- Access to an allotment / garden.

More information

See the website of the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, for its work on the **wellbeing** of human rights defenders, where there are also links to the Barcelona Guidelines in five languages. The Centre has also produced a number of **policy briefs** on different aspects of wellbeing.

Bartley, P. (2020) 'Wellbeing during temporary international relocation: Case studies and good practices for the implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines'. Stuttgart: ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen).

The Open Briefing website has **resources** on trauma and psychological support.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER HUB
POLICY BRIEF 8 | OCTOBER 2019

UNIVERSITY of York

Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk

Social support

Having a social support network that is strong and meaningful can contribute to the wellbeing of defenders, enabling them to get the most out of the programme, and provide important support to the staff engaged in the programme. Without such a network, there is a danger of isolation, loneliness and cultural shock, amongst other things, for relocated human rights defenders. It is therefore important to provide a supportive environment, separate from wellbeing provision. This may be through the establishing of social networks or a support scheme or similar volunteer network. Students may be able to contribute to this, or volunteers from the local community. Other local or alumni human rights defenders can play an important role here too. There may also be established local support groups that you can draw on for assistance.

Support from a local NGO at the University of Deusto

Beyond financial and academic support, developing a social network of support that can help human rights defenders, and their families, is key for the success of the Programme. Integration in a new environment is not an easy process, especially when there are linguistic barriers. Children go to school and find ways to socialise and, eventually, learn the language. In the case of parents and adults, that process of socialisation and integration is much more challenging.

In Deusto, the University has collaborated with a local NGO which provides this valuable support to those on the Programme. Fundación Ellacuria, an NGO of the Society of Jesus that works for the creation of a multicultural citizenship in the Basque Country, arranges excursions, cinema trips, Spanish lessons, and opportunities for socialisation and mutual exchange with local families and individuals. As part of a volunteer programme run by the Fundación Ellacuria, University staff have joined a support group to accompany human rights defenders hosted at the University. The volunteer group is led by a social integration specialist from Fundación Ellacuria. The support includes integration at the University and in the community.

The 'Friends Scheme' at the University of York

The Friends Scheme sits alongside the University's Protective Fellowship Scheme and provides practical and social support to relocated human rights defenders through a network of volunteers. The role of the Friends is to befriend defenders, to help them settle in, to explain local culture and customs, and to introduce them to the everyday life of the local community. Each defender is allocated a group of Friends from a pool of volunteers, mostly retired, who have an interest in human rights and social justice. The coordinators of the programme, who are also volunteers, try to match defenders to Friends who have shared interests, or perhaps knowledge of the language or country of the defender.

Each defender is sent a welcome email with some background information about their Friends before arrival. The Friends then meet the defender at the train station, take them to their accommodation, and remain in regular contact for the first few days, striving to ensure defenders feel neither isolated nor overloaded. Friends provide ongoing social support for at least the first 4-6 weeks, inviting them to events and introducing them to the local area, such as trips to cafes, museums, and the coast. After this, the Friends or the defender can choose to discontinue the relationship. In practice, most continue to meet up for the duration of the defender's stay, with many remaining in contact after they have left the Programme. As well as these social events, over the years Friends have organised a bike scheme, provided English conversation lessons, sourced extra clothing, accompanied defenders to medical appointments, and helped to establish wellbeing and counselling provision.

The Friends Scheme is one of mutual benefit. Feedback from Friends demonstrates that the Scheme offers an enriching experience to volunteers and creates links for them with the local community, and evaluations completed by defenders at the end of the programme highlight how the Scheme enhances their emotional wellbeing and overall experience of relocation.

Feedback on the University of York 'Friends Scheme'

From human rights defenders –

> *In my case I really enjoyed my friends. They are very friendly, funny. They helped me a lot – both practically and emotionally. I didn't have much social life before coming to York. I could have dinner with them without thinking about politics and feel safe. We talked about lots of different things.*
>
> *I don't know how I would be able to survive York without it – especially at the beginning of the fellowship. I love my friends. They were life-affirming and these will be life-time friendships.*
>
> *This [Friends Scheme] is the most amazing part of the emotional protection… It gives the opportunity to learn about the local culture and society very quickly and effectively.*

From volunteers –

> *I found, yet again, the whole experience extremely rewarding. It was a privilege to get to know [HRD] and I learned a lot from him.*
>
> *I realised that being [HRD]'s friend meant exactly that – introducing her to my own local friends and integrating her into my circle. It didn't feel like volunteering but meeting someone new and wonderful.*

More information

Crawshaw, M., Brown, M. and Eriksson, S. (2023) 'Using a volunteer friends support scheme in a temporary relocation programme'. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 15, Issue 2, July 2023, pages 581 to 594.

'Offer personal as well as professional support' in CARA's **Supporting persecuted academics: A Guide for Higher Education Institutions** (page 37).

Safety and security

Even after relocation there may still be risks to the safety and security of the human rights defenders you are hosting. This may stem from the defenders' home countries, from the host community, or from risks on campus.

Risk during relocation

- **Risk at home** – defender activities or political developments may enhance risk at home for the defender's organisation or their family, or for the defender on their return.

- **Risk in the host community** – can come in the form of racism, political factions or transnational repression in exile communities, from agents within these communities or via online threats and harassment.

- **Risk on campus** – arguments and tension with other defenders on the programme, conflict with student groups, and data stored by the university may compromise security on campus.

Whilst some defenders may not wish for their presence in the host country to be visible, others may take the opportunity to increase their visibility, which could enhance their security or increase risk. It is important to note that risk situations and the preferences of hosted defenders can change during the course of the relocation. Programme staff should have early conversations with defenders about security, and continuously assess this in dialogue with the individual defender.

Programmes should consider what measures they need to take to ensure the protection of privacy, and whether any reporting requirements might impact security and / or privacy. For example, will the university require the programme to report on defenders' activities and whereabouts, and how much information will funders require?

A core element of training on relocation programmes is security training, which is important for defenders both on the programme and in their subsequent work. For example, training on digital footprints will alert defenders to how technology may be used to monitor them.

Universities' safeguarding policies and procedures may provide helpful advice on where to find more support.

Safety and security
Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee

Prior to arrival, the team works with defenders and nominating organisations to prepare support and protection plans. Each plan is individual, evolving and focused on long-term protection. Communication is via Signal and secure email, avoiding language (human rights defenders, risk, protection, etc.) which could pose any risks. The protection process includes:

- Full needs assessment.

- Briefing documents on country and / or thematic risk.

- Emergency protocol which details check-in procedures and advocacy plans in case of various scenarios.

- A security plan for travel.

- Discussion of the challenges and risks of a safe return.

- Protection planning around visibility and risk whilst on relocation.

- Full in-person security training.

If there are urgent digital security needs, Front Line Defenders are contacted and regional online support can be offered.

Key providers of specialist security training

- **Open Briefing** – safety and security, digital and information security, wellbeing and resilience

- **Tactical Tech** – digital security

- **Protection International** – security and protection

- **Kamara Global** – risk management, security

More information
Experiences of racism in the host country have been documented by scholars on relocation programmes in the US: **38 Paradise Road, Being an African francophone refugee scholar in American academia** and: **Gay in Nigeria, black male in America**.

Networking and advocacy

Incorporating networking and advocacy into a relocation programme can help to raise the profile of human rights defenders, enhancing the work of individuals, organisations and collectives on the defenders' return. It can also mitigate risk on defenders' return home. The university can help facilitate connections and collaborations between human rights defenders and academics with relevant areas of expertise. Opportunities for networking and advocacy activities can be arranged through trips to other universities, exchanges with other relocation programmes, attending conferences, public talks at local schools and community groups, and meetings with local politicians, NGOs and government officials.

Types of networking

GOVERNMENT AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

NGOS AND DONORS

PROFESSIONAL BODIES, E.G. ASSOCIATIONS OF LAWYERS, JOURNALISTS

LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

FAITH GROUPS   UNIVERSITY/IES

ARTISTS AND CULTURAL ACTORS

Research, teaching and training

One of the advantages of relocation within a university setting is access to a range of already-existing research, teaching and training opportunities. A weekly schedule of classes and training provides a valuable structure for defenders who are away from family and work. Opportunities should be explored for programme participants to attend classes in departments relevant to their expertise. Classes may be optional or mandatory, or a combination of both.

> *The discussion in the classroom during the fellowship inspired me with new ideas and knowledge in geopolitical and human rights issues which will be reflected in my future work. My fellowship helped to review and evaluate my previous work and my understanding of the human rights situation in other country contexts which impact the world and shows the importance of global advocacy and solidarity for the enhancement of human rights.*

Human rights defender, Middle East

Universities often have standard classes that might be of benefit to defenders, such as IT courses, language classes, or research skills training. Generic university provision may be suitable in some cases and for some individuals, while bespoke training, by people familiar with the defender's situation and interests, may be better in other circumstances.

Access to university library resources is often critical to defenders. If necessary, this can include training on how to use library databases, access electronic journals, request materials through interlibrary loan services, and use other software that enhances research.

Alongside these opportunities, it is important that defenders also have access to physical spaces, such as in the host centre or department, to work. The overall goal is to provide the resources needed for defenders to reflect, think and plan for the future. Such plans can include continuing past work with enhanced capacities, a step change in human rights activities, or starting out in a new direction.

It is important that temporary relocation schemes acknowledge human rights defenders as sources of knowledge and theory, as well as potentially benefiting from educational provision and capacity building. Relocation is best understood as a process of knowledge exchange and mutual learning. Students and staff will benefit enormously from the presence of defenders in classes, discussions about research, and in the life of the host institution. Defenders contribute to the pluralising and decolonising of knowledge in the academy. As such, relocation schemes can be showcased as examples of innovation and excellence in teaching and research.

Curricula developing and the delivery of applied / activist pedagogies
American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan

The American University of Central Asia (AUCA), with the support of the Open Society Foundations (OSF), ran a Human Rights Fellowship Programme between January 2023 and August 2024. This initiative focused on providing teaching opportunities for fellows, improving their research skills, and involving them in community engagement.

Through the Fellowship, the Fellows revamped the Human Rights Concentration within the Liberal Arts and Sciences department, creating a new interdisciplinary course titled Human Rights, Arts, and Technology. This course integrated theoretical exploration, practical projects, and critical analysis to teach students how art and technology can promote and protect human rights, culminating in a public art exhibition. This exhibition served as a platform to raise awareness, foster dialogue, and promote social change by showcasing diverse artworks addressing various human rights issues.

Concurrently, the Fellows were involved in AUCA's Legal Clinic's Street Law Project, where they mentored law students to deliver legal education to high school pupils. This project not only empowered the Fellows and law students through enhanced public speaking and teaching skills but also promoted civic engagement and legal awareness among high school pupils. The initiative included multiple open class sessions in Bishkek and Osh, provided free educational materials, and fostered a deeper understanding of legal and human rights issues.

One criticism of relocation programmes is that they are too focused on individuals. How can you leverage relocation to try to ensure benefits cascade from an individual to their community, organisation and networks? There are various ways of advancing this goal.

Cascading benefits of relocation

One method for cascading benefits is through training, and a train the trainer approach. Such training could cover issues ranging from digital and physical security to aspects of international human rights law.

Another option is to ask defenders to work on a project as part of their programme of activities. The topic should be determined by the defender, and the needs of their organisation. Projects could include developing training toolkits, funding bids, reports, organisational strategies, etc. Mentorship could be provided by an academic in the host institution, supported by presentations to a wider group of staff. Pump prime or seed funding may be provided to support project development and implementation in some cases when defenders return home.

The experience of one university relocation provider, which requires applicants to identify a project they would like to work on as part of the application process, is that it is better to request a core idea at the application stage (rather than expecting a detailed project plan) and work on the details once relocation begins.

If defenders have a heavy workload for their organisations or movements, they will have less time to devote to such initiatives. But where projects are successfully completed there are benefits for the host university, the defenders, and for a wider community in their home country.

More information
'Offer opportunities for academic and professional development' and 'Provide opportunities for enhancing English proficiency' in CARA's **Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions** (page 34 and page 40).

SECTION THREE – PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE AND POST-PROGRAMME SUPPORT

This section covers options at the end of relocation programmes and support post-programme; the benefits of protection programmes when defenders return home and also when they continue their work in other ways; and the long-term duty of care of protection providers.

Human rights defender, Ukraine

Pathways out of relocation programmes

Expectations around return vary between programmes: some long-term fellowships do not expect participants to return to their home country, whereas for other universities return is a requirement, unless the risks are too high. In all cases, preparing for the end of the programme, and the transitions this entails, should begin early and be an ongoing process throughout the period of relocation so that participants and programme staff can work together to manage opportunities, challenges and risks. Ultimately the responsibility for the future of the defender rests with the defender, even if the programme staff can help them explore different scenarios and practicalities.

It is important to stress that all outcomes can be considered a success if defenders have been able to take stock of their careers and lives and face the future, whatever that holds, with renewed resolve. When defenders return home or to a third country to continue or extend their human rights work, many schemes will have fulfilled their goal. If defenders claim asylum, developing their human rights or other careers abroad, protection schemes have helped them transition to safety and to the possibility of alternative futures.

When return is possible

Preparation for return often begins even before arrival. Whether defenders are returning home or to a third country, programmes should have processes in place to support a safe return. Risk assessments and security plans can clarify what support will be available and address any potential risks or challenges defenders may face upon returning home. Universities can also support defenders to transition back to their home countries and communities after the programme ends by offering resettlement grants. Some programmes provide bridging funding, to cover one year's accommodation or educational support or fees.

> **Case study**
> ## University of Burgos
>
> The University of Burgos, in collaboration with Association Burgos with Colombia, has developed a strategy to facilitate the safe return of human rights defenders to Colombia following their participation in a temporary relocation Programme. Key to this strategy is the Selection Committee's risk assessment, conducted in partnership with the Permanent Committee for Human Rights Defence (CPDH). This process ensures that only low risk cases are chosen, with CPDH establishing critical self-protection norms for participants.
>
> One month prior to the planned return, the University will engage with Colombia's National Protection Unit. This collaboration seeks to alert them to the specific risks faced by the defenders and to request preventive measures and security plans for each individual.
>
> To further support the defenders, the Programme provides a comprehensive package, including legal assistance to address legal challenges, psychological support, and practical help for reintegration into their communities. Networking opportunities are also offered to facilitate ongoing support and collaboration, coupled with consistent communication from the University to address any emerging concerns.
>
> The return to Colombia is a commitment of the individual to the Temporary Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders – Burgos with Colombia and to their grassroots organisations, except in the scenarios where a safe return to Colombia is not feasible due to legal issues stemming from their human rights defence activities. In such instances, support will be sought through CEAR (Spanish Commission for Refugee Help) to proceed with an asylum claim.

Many defenders who have been on protection programmes testify to the value of the period of respite and capacity support for their own work, but there can also be many benefits for their organisations, networks and communities when defenders return home as the testimonies below demonstrate.

> *In returning home, I will take the lead in a new human rights and climate justice organisation. I am excited to implement the ideas and knowledge I have gained – in indigenous education, transformative justice, collective care for human rights defenders, and the role universities can play in protecting human rights.*
>
> **Human rights defender**, Philippines

> *Before joining the program I was feeling alone, under pressure after the detention of colleagues. The program helped me to rest, rebuild resilience, and learn from others. When back home I worked on human rights projects and advocated for activists in prison, now leading an emerging organisation working on human rights and mental health.*
>
> **Human rights defender**, Burundi

When safe return is not possible

In some cases, human rights defenders (and their families) may not be able to return after the completion of the programme due to risk and insecurity in their home country. If a safe return is not possible, what are the alternatives for defenders, and possibly their families? For some, seeking asylum or third country pathways may be the only viable and safe option. Another possibility is extending the fellowship, or finding a place on a different fellowship scheme within your network or the wider protection **ecosystem**. Some programmes have funding available, or may be able to secure new funding, to provide additional temporary or emergency support for defenders who are not able to return.

For defenders who choose to seek asylum, the process is often both complex and hostile. Decisions can take months or even years. The realities of the asylum process and refugee status should be made clear, and it might be helpful for this advice to come from others who have been through the process rather than university staff. One long-term programme, where the majority of participants claim asylum, encourages defenders to save money from the start for an uncertain future.

Some universities may need to distance themselves from the asylum process whilst others may not have the necessary expertise or the resources to help. However, some universities have supported asylum cases through student / law clinics. Where a university is unable to offer assistance, could defenders be directed to relevant NGOs or alternative communities of support where there are others in a similar situation?

> *The Fellowship has had a significant impact on my current situation in terms of work and my future pathway. It allowed me to step back from dealing with the immediate impact of the Nicaraguan situation and consider the possibility of rebuilding my work from another angle. The Fellowship has given me the space and the opportunity to make clearer decisions and to move into the wider regional role that I am currently in. I have been able to put into practice so many of the things that I learned – from better protection mechanisms, how to conduct advocacy at an international level and how to look after my wellbeing – in my new regional role.*

Human rights defender, Nicaragua (now in Mexico)

> *The Fellowship made me realise that devoting time free of stress and constant confrontation with oppressing systems to focus on your healing and professional development pays back with new opportunities and ways of contributing to promoting and protecting human rights. Although I was not able to continue my national LGBTI+ rights activism for much longer upon my return to Belarus after the Fellowship due to the increasing persecution and intimidation... I continued growing professionally by receiving a master's degree in International Relations in Ireland and working with various regional and international human rights networks and organisations, including the one I am now working with, a London-based international LGBTI+ rights organisation. Considering how traumatic and unsafe human rights work can be, it was a life-changing experience to shift my focus and efforts towards other countries and regions. It helped me find the strength not to give up and stay active in the cause.*

Human rights defender, Belarus (now in UK)

Longer-term duty of care

After defenders have left the programme, either having returned home or to a third country, or having sought asylum, what is the university's duty of care, and how long should this care last? Will the university maintain contact with human rights defenders in the longer term, and if so, how? It should be noted that there are challenges to maintaining a duty of care when the number of human rights defender alumni increases. Active maintenance of an alumni network requires time and resources beyond the day-to-day functioning of relocation programmes. So realism is also needed about the kinds and volume of support that universities have the capacity to provide.

Staying in touch

Whilst human rights defenders will vary in how much they wish to remain in contact with universities, some examples of how programmes have done this are:

- Ongoing use of university email / library accounts (regularly stated by defenders to be extremely significant beyond the programme).
- Inviting former participants to be guest speakers or to co-teach courses remotely.
- Creating an alumni network or an alumni mentoring scheme, for example where current fellows are put in touch with former fellows who can provide advice.

Case study
Students at Risk (StAR) Program, Norway

Students at Risk (StAR) is a program that supports students, who due to their human rights activism, are at risk of being formally or de facto denied educational or other rights in their home country. The Program is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (**HK-Dir**).

Accepted candidates receive scholarships to complete their education at participating Norwegian Higher Education Institutions. Upon completion of their degree in Norway, students are expected to return to their home country or find other opportunities independently.

As most students continue their activism and human rights work, some individuals need longer-term support from **SAIH** – The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund – through processes such as applying for asylum, identifying opportunities in a third country, or after they return home and face new risks due to their human rights work or political engagement.

Host institutions in Norway have been allies in ensuring continued protection of StAR alumni, engaging in campaigns, or offering practical support after the Program. Creating a network that accompanies students throughout their human rights career is something that SAIH continues to advocate for by strengthening networks with relevant human rights actors.

A final question around the duty of care is what role universities should play if defenders they hosted in the past face repression and threats after they have returned home. In such situations, the centre or department that hosted the defender might consider writing a letter to the relevant authorities, signing petitions circulated by others, or engaging in advocacy on the defender's behalf in other ways.

More information
'Plan early! Get ready for return' in SAR's **How to host – A handbook for higher education partners** (page 33). **Risk analysis and protection plan principles** compiled by Protection International and available in multiple languages.

Evaluation

Finally, it is good practice to evaluate your programme periodically. One way to do this is by conducting exit interviews, which can be useful for funding reports as well as for improving the programme. You may also wish to carry out further interviews after a certain period of time to better assess the impact of the programme. For example, interviews could be conducted six months after defenders have left the programme.

A longer-term challenge is how to build an evidence base for the effectiveness of protection and relocation schemes, and how 'effectiveness' is assessed. Universities are well placed to assist in developing methodologies and criteria for such evaluations. These evaluations will then help secure funding and support to continue providing protection and relocation opportunities, and thus enable universities to reinvigorate and stand in solidarity with the extraordinary work that human rights defenders do.

FURTHER INFORMATION

University relocation programmes and providers included in these Guidelines

- Protective Fellowship Programme, African Universities Hub for Human Rights (AUH), University of the Western Cape, South Africa
- Boris Nemtsov's MA in Russian Studies, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
- Centre of Cooperation and Solidarity Action, University of Burgos, Spain
- George Mason University, USA
- Human Rights Institute, University of Connecticut, USA
- Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University, Thailand
- Pedro Arrupe Institute for Human Rights, University of Deusto, Spain
- Practitioners at Risk run by Scholars at Risk, International
- Protective Fellowship Scheme, Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, UK
- Sanctuary for National Minorities (Manilakbayan), University of the Philippines
- Scholars at Risk Program, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada
- Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship, University of Dundee, UK
- Students at Risk (StAR) Program, Norway

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about any of the relocation programmes discussed in this document, or about hosting human rights defenders in general, those involved in bringing this document together would be happy to help.

We also have a repository of documents in the form of templates that relocation providers may find useful. For example, nomination and application forms, needs and risk assessments, security plans, and programme evaluations.

For all enquiries, please email *hrdhub@york.ac.uk*

General information

Eriksson, S. (2018) 'Temporary relocation in an academic setting for human rights defenders at risk: Good practice lessons and challenges'. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 10, Issue 3, November 2018, pages 482 to 507.

Gready, P. and Jackson, E. (2023) 'Universities as sites of activism and protection'. York: UNESCO Chair in Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Expansion of Political Space. Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, Working Paper 1.

Lester, T., Phillips, K. and Pearson, N.L. (ed.) (2010) 'Art spaces hosting activism: Using surplus resources to provide individual assistance and strengthen community engagement'. The Center for Victims of Torture – New Tactics in Human Rights Project, USA.

Nah, A. M., Jones, M. D., Bartley, P., Müller, M. (ed.), and Seiden, S. (2019) 'Temporary shelter and relocation initiatives: Perspectives of managers and participants'. ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy.

Key documents referenced in these Guidelines

Supporting persecuted academics: A guide for higher education institutions – Council for At Risk Academics
(*https://www.cara.ngo/downloads/supporting-persecuted-academics-2009-cara-booklet.pdf*)

How to set up a Shelter City manual and Toolbox for Shelter City Support Staff –
Justice and Peace, Netherlands
(*https://sheltercity.org/shelter-cities/*)

How to host: A handbook for higher education partners – Scholars at Risk
(*https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/how-to-host-handbook/*)

The Scholar Rescue Fund FAQs include sections on the application process, the responsibilities of the host institution, and guidance on managing return
(*https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/applicants/frequent-questions/*)

A discussion of the threats and risks faced by human rights defenders can be found in the
Esperanza Protocol
(*https://esperanzaprotocol.net/es/download-the-protocol/*)

*This fellowship has been more than just a learning experience.
It has been a life changing journey. I'm looking forward to continuing this
important work with the new knowledge, skills and connections I have gained.*

Human rights defender, India

CAHR
Centre for **Applied**
Human Rights

UNIVERSITY
of York

york.ac.uk

UNESCO   uni Twin

unesco

Chair