

Comments on the Implementation of Security Screening Protocols for Admissions at EPFL

This position statement is written jointly by:

- CCE, *the EPFL Teachers Council*
- ELSA, *the EPFL Scientific Staff Association*
- PolyDoc, the EPFL PhD students' association
- EPDA, the EPFL postdocs' association

—

To the EPFL Assembly,

As representatives of the intermediary body—a diverse group of PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and scientists—we wish to express our shared commitment to upholding the values of inclusion, transparency, and equity that define EPFL's mission. Recent discussions around security screening protocols and their potential implications on academic freedom and international collaboration have raised concerns that we believe warrant broader and more inclusive dialogue.

EPFL thrives as a global hub for education, research, and innovation because of its diverse and talented community. Many of us, as members of the intermediary body, come from various international backgrounds and bring unique perspectives to the university's endeavors. However, we are concerned by the lack of intermediary body representatives included in the discussions concerning these new measures. This risks overlooking the practical experiences of the people most directly affected by this institutional policy.

We strongly urge the EPFL leadership team to ensure that the intermediary body has a seat at the table in discussions regarding policies that directly impact the academic, professional, and personal lives of our community. Specifically, we request representation on the commissions and in consultations responsible for admissions, security screening, and international collaboration policies. Our inclusion in these bodies would enhance decision-making by providing valuable insights into the practical implications of these policies and ensuring alignment with the needs and aspirations of EPFL's global academic population.

Transparency is foundational to trust. To maintain EPFL's reputation as a fair and open institution, it is essential that decisions regarding admissions, security screenings, and international collaborations are guided by clear and transparent criteria. This would prevent misunderstandings, reduce the potential for perceived biases, and uphold the principles of meritocracy. Furthermore, we propose establishing mechanisms to anonymously collect, analyze, and present aggregated data on admissions campaigns to the EPFL community. We acknowledge the existing EPFL statistics tool (<https://www.epfl.ch/about/facts/fr/statistiques-institutionnelles/>), we suggest providing more detailed reports. These reports should include anonymized information on acceptances and rejections, with details on the reasons for decisions and nationality—ensuring compliance with data protection regulations to safeguard individual privacy.

International students and researchers are integral to EPFL's success. Their struggles, whether bureaucratic, financial, or emotional, often go unnoticed. Policies that inadvertently create barriers for international talent risk undermining EPFL's and Switzerland's leadership position in academia and innovation.

We emphasize the need for:

- **Proactive Support Services:** Strengthening administrative and social support for international students to navigate challenges, particularly those arising from visa restrictions or new institutional policies.
- **Equity in Opportunities:** Ensuring all candidates, regardless of their country of origin or circumstances, are evaluated on their individual merit, consistent with EPFL's commitment to fairness.
- **Collaboration over Isolation:** Policies should reflect EPFL's role as a bridge between nations, fostering global dialogue and understanding through science and education.

It is crucial to recognize that our community, the intermediary body, is composed predominantly of individuals in precarious situations. These talented individuals come from all over the world, accepting temporary contracts and taking significant risks to secure positions at EPFL. This not only affects EPFL's competitiveness but also potentially limits the diversity and richness of our academic community. The potential implementation of security screening measures presents obstacles in Switzerland's ability to attract exceptional talent and for these individuals to integrate into the local job market. Any measures decided upon should be the minimum that upholds security that also maintains EPFL's excellent scientific standing.

As EPFL continues to adapt to global challenges, it is critical to reaffirm the values of openness and equity that have made it a leader in the academic world. By including intermediary body representatives in policy discussions, committing to transparency, and prioritizing the needs of its international community, EPFL can ensure it remains a beacon of opportunity and innovation.

We stand ready to collaborate with EPFL leadership, faculty, staff and students to shape policies that reflect our shared commitment to excellence, inclusion, and fairness.

Sincerely,



Kelvin Lau



Nikita Norkin



Sándor Lipcsei

on behalf of ELSA



Berind Vosberg



Camille Rolland

on behalf of Polydoc



Matthias Durrieu



Rens Chazottes

on behalf of EPDA

on behalf of CCE

Lausanne, 26.03.2025