CAREER PATHS OF FORMER META FAIR RESEARCHERS: A LABORATORY THAT NURTURES AN ECOSYSTEM OF ACTORS

SUMMARY

Fundamental AI Research (FAIR) is Meta's artificial intelligence research laboratory, established in the United States in 2013 and in Paris since 2015. Since 2015, the FAIR Paris laboratory has hosted more than 120 researchers and PHD students. Their career paths were analyzed to assess the diffusion effect within the surrounding AI ecosystem, based on data collected via the LinkedIn platform. Among the PHD students who completed their theses by the end of 2024, 62% moved on to other parts of the ecosystem. Overall, the vast majority of FAIR Paris alumni who left the lab remain in Paris (93%). Some have contributed to the creation of leading players in the Paris AI ecosystem, including Mistral AI and Kuytai, whose founding teams are largely composed of former FAIR Paris members.

1. INTRODUCTION : FAIR, AN AI LABORATORY WHICH HAS EFFECTS ON HUMAN CAPITAL

1.1 PRESENTATION : FAIR PARIS, A GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LABORATORY

Fundamental AI Research (FAIR) Labs is Meta's artificial intelligence research laboratory. In 2015, Meta decided to open its first FAIR lab outside the United States in Paris—'Meta FAIR Paris', hereinafter referred to as 'FAIR Paris'. This AI center of excellence is embedded within a strong local academic ecosystem through numerous partnerships with leading institutions and supports both the attraction and retention of talent. FAIR Labs follows a model close to that of academic institutions:

'Open Science' (publishing in academic journals, international conferences, or online articles) and 'Open Source' (open-access publication of software libraries, datasets, or machine learning models). Among FAIR's major open-source contributions are Llama-1, Meta's large language model, and other models and libraries with significant impact on the global AI community. Notable examples include DINOv2[1], specialized in image recognition and visual understanding, which has been downloaded more than 9 million times since the end of February and the end of March 2025, and FAISS[2], a software library for similarity search. These models and libraries are freely available online and contribute directly to accelerating the global momentum of AI and its applications.

Box – FAISS: A Highly Influential Vector Search Engine.

FAISS (Facebook AI Similarity Search) is a vector search engine developed by FAIR that has established itself as a reference both in the world of engineering and academic research.

With over 34,000 stars on GitHub, FAISS is Meta's eighth most popular open source project, ahead of well-known tools like zstd, fairseq, and proxygen. The platform has attracted 180 external contributors and over 4,200 opened issues, reflecting a vibrant community and an actively maintained project.

FAISS is also widely adopted by the tech community. There are 29 tutorial videos on YouTube dedicated to it, as well as an external book and tutorial written by James Briggs—testament to its educational value. The tool is at the core of BigANN competitions, a benchmark series in large-scale approximate nearest neighbor search.

Its influence extends beyond technical circles. FAISS is regularly featured at major conferences and on podcasts, including those organized by Weaviate, Pinecone, Nvidia, and Rockset. These invitations highlight its recognition within the global artificial intelligence ecosystem.

FAISS also plays a foundational role in the economic ecosystem of vector search. Several tech companies specializing in vector data management have been built directly on FAISS or used it as inspiration in their early stages. This includes Zilliz/Milvus, which is based on FAISS while enhancing it in terms of performance, functionality, and usability.

1.2 OBJECTIVE : ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF FAIR ON HUMAN CAPITAL

In this note, Asterès focuses on the effects of FAIR's establishment in Paris on human capital. By setting up operations in Paris, FAIR contributes to the development of a Parisian ecosystem of AI talent. By hiring researchers and co-supervising PhD students through the CIFRE program — an industrial PhD framework created in France in 1981 — FAIR plays a role in training young talent, fostering networking among AI professionals, and enhancing the attractiveness of the Paris region. Other potential effects, such as FAIR Paris' impact on academic research output or on technological and economic production, are not explored in this note

[1] https://dinov2.metademolab.com/
[2] https://ai.meta.com/tools/faiss/

2. METHOD: BUILDING A DATABASE ON THE CAREER PATHS OF FORMER FAIR RESEARCHERS

2.1 APPROACH: TRACKING THE CAREER PATHS OF LABORATORY MEMBERS

Since 2015, the FAIR laboratory has hosted full-time researchers (referred to internally as *research scientists*), engineers (*research engineers*), and doctoral students (*PhD students*) for the duration of their thesis (3 years). The PHD students are supported through CIFRE contracts and are therefore supervised by researchers from one of FAIR Paris's partner institutions. Naturally, some of these PHD students go on to join other laboratories, companies, or launch entrepreneurial ventures after the end of their CIFRE contract. The purpose of this section is to assess FAIR's indirect contribution to the AI ecosystem in the Paris region and beyond, through the career paths of PHD students and researchers who have passed through the lab.

2.2 SOURCE: MANUAL COLLECTION OF CURRENT POSITIONS

Asterès collected the current positions of 123 researchers, engineers, and PHD students from FAIR Paris since the laboratory's opening, using data from LinkedIn. Researcher identification was cross-checked with current FAIR members to ensure the completeness of the dataset. Only publicly available information from LinkedIn or ResearchGate was used. Asterès deliberately chose not to use any other sources of information.

2.3 CATEGORIZATION AND PROCESSING: REFLECTING THE DIVERSITY OF CAREER PATHS

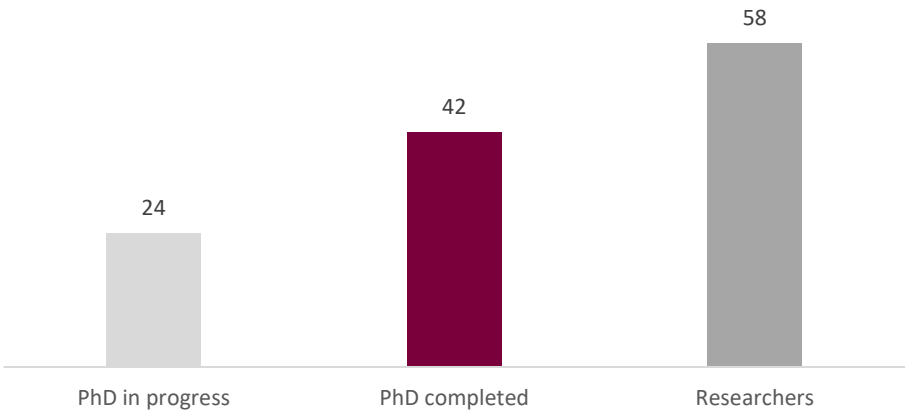
The data was categorized to reflect the diversity of situations at the time of joining and at present. First, the entry status at FAIR Paris—either as a PHD student or as a researcher. Second, the current situation—whether still at FAIR Paris, elsewhere within Meta, or in other organizations. Third, for those working in other organizations, the geographic location, the type of organization, and specific details about their role. Once categorized, the data was processed using basic statistical rules.

3. RESULTS: A LABORATORY THAT SPREADS ACROSS THE ENTREPRENEURIAL AND RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

3.1 RESEARCHERS AT FAIR PARIS: ALREADY 123 RESEARCHERS CONCERNED

FAIR's indirect contribution to the AI ecosystem in the Paris region primarily occurs through the co-supervision of PHD students, with 42 having completed their theses since the lab's opening. Since 2015, among the 123 profiles reviewed by Asterès, 59 joined FAIR Paris as researchers—either research scientists or research engineers—representing 48% of the total, while 64 joined as PHD students, or 52%. Of these PHD students, 42 have defended their theses and 22 are still ongoing. On average, around ten PHD students complete their PhD each year and may then either join Meta or contribute to the wider ecosystem.

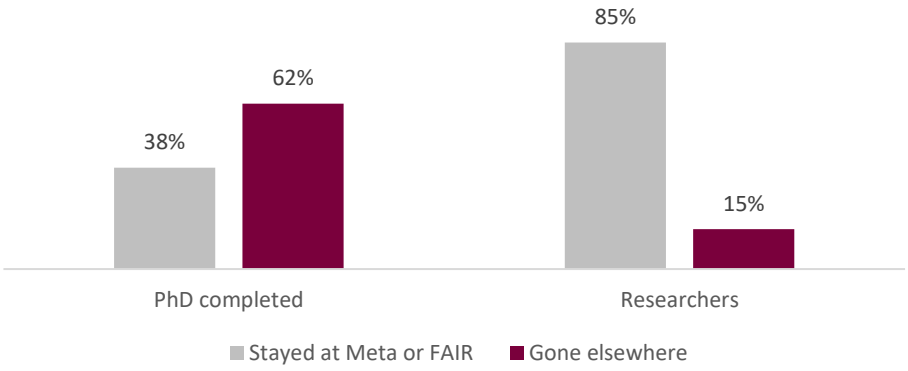
Distribution of FAIR Paris Staff Since 2015



3.2 EXPANSION FROM META FAIR PARIS: 31 HIGH-LEVEL PROFILES NOW WORKING IN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Among the researchers and PHD students who have completed their PhD, 35% are currently working outside of FAIR or Meta, while 65% remain employed within those structures. More specifically, 26 former PHD students now work elsewhere, compared to 16 who have stayed within Meta or FAIR-related institutions—representing 62% and 38%, respectively. Among researchers, 50 remain at Meta or FAIR, while 9 now work elsewhere, or 85% and 15%. This difference reflects the structural distinction between a co-supervised PhD and a research position. Across both groups—excluding PHD students who have not yet completed their thesis—101 career trajectories have been documented.

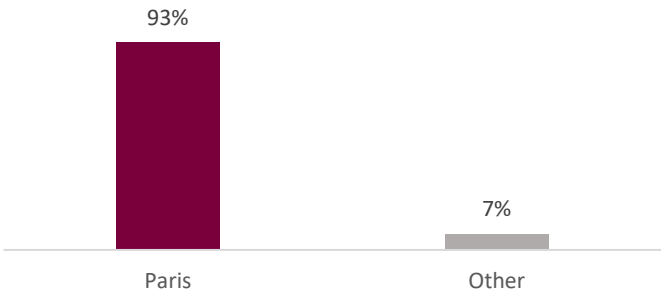
Current Positions of FAIR Paris Alumni Since 2015



3.3 GEOGRAPHIC DESTINATIONS: A COHORT THAT REMAINS IN THE PARISIAN AI ECOSYSTEM

Among all profiles who have passed through FAIR Paris, the vast majority still work within the Paris AI ecosystem. Specifically, 93% of profiles are still based in France, while 7% work abroad. Among those who have moved on from FAIR, 10% are no longer in France, and among those who remained at Meta, 6% are based outside of France.

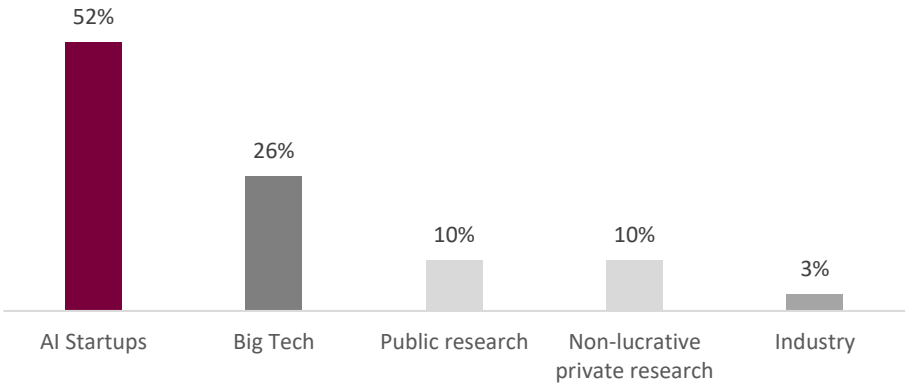
Distribution of FAIR Paris Alumni Since 2015 (Excluding Ongoing PhDs)



3.4 ORGANIZATIONS BENEFITING FROM FAIR PARIS TALENT EXPANSION: UNICORNS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESEARCH, AI STARTUPS

Among the researchers and PHD students who left FAIR and Meta to join other organizations, most moved to key players in the Paris AI ecosystem: Mistral AI, Google DeepMind in Paris, and the Kuytai lab. Specifically, out of 32 profiles analyzed, 9 are now at Mistral AI—the French AI unicorn—6 at Google DeepMind Paris, 3 in public research in France (across various universities), and 3 at the Paris-based lab Kyutai. Other notable destinations include major AI players like Apple and Microsoft, AI startups such as Helsing and WaveformAI, and the industrial group Stellantis. Overall, those who left FAIR have distributed across 52% in AI startups mostly in Europe, 26% at Google, Apple, and Microsoft, 10% in French public research, 10% in non-profit private research, and 3% in industry.

Aggregated Current Positions of FAIR Paris Alumni Who Have Left the Laboratory Since 2015 (France Scope).



3.5 ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTRIBUTION: CO-FOUNDERS OF THREE MAJOR AI PROJECTS

Among the individuals who passed through FAIR Paris before joining other organizations, some played a more or less decisive role in the development of companies or research labs. While it is impossible to establish a direct causal link between their time at FAIR Paris and the success of these ventures, the laboratory has likely contributed to these career trajectories. In this regard, three major players in the Paris AI ecosystem—and one Silicon Valley startup—owe part of their founding teams to former FAIR Paris members: Mistral AI, Kyutai, Nabla, and WaveformAI.

- Two of the three co-founders of Mistral AI, as well as the company's first employee, are former FAIR Paris researchers. Now a leader in French AI, the company maintains close ties to the lab, with nine current employees having passed through FAIR Paris and part of the founding team having met there.
- Three of the six co-founders of the recently launched Kyutai lab in Paris are former FAIR Paris members. Kyutai is a non-profit research lab dedicated to open AI research.
- A former Research Engineer Manager of FAIR Paris co-founded Nabla in 2018, a startup that uses AI to reduce doctors' administrative workload.
- A former FAIR Paris PHD student, who later joined OpenAI, is one of the two co-founders of WaveformAI, a Silicon Valley company specializing in AI-generated voice technology

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