



Declaration Supporting at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists: A call to action

Preamble

Countless scientists¹ are displaced each year by war, political instability, and human-made and natural disasters. Some are killed. Countries that once had well-established science communities and thriving research ecosystems have seen these weakened, even destroyed, by conflict, violence or repression. In some cases, countries in the earlier stages of developing their research ecosystems face the almost complete eradication of the science capacity that they were in the process of building. Those scientists who survive such crises may be displaced internally, forced into exile in neighbouring countries, or end up scattered far from their homes, without jobs and without prospects.

Members of the global scientific community are rightly alarmed whenever a nation's scientific enterprise faces a crisis which forces its scientists and graduate students to abandon their work and flee. In addition to the human tragedy, the resulting loss of scientific knowledge, systems and data has grave implications for national and international science² communities, and for society more widely.

A number of organizations and initiatives are already working to support threatened scientists, whose expertise and skills are a vital resource. To enhance and complement these efforts, and to take this work to an even higher level, there is an urgent need for intensified international collaboration to provide immediate and appropriate long-term support and protection to scholars and scientists who are at-risk, displaced³ or refugees⁴, so they can continue to make their rightful contributions to global science.

We, the undersigned, have therefore come together to endorse the following Articles of Commitment, which are in line with the spirit and recommendations of key global and regional conventions⁵. We call on all stakeholders of science, and those involved in humanitarian activities, to join us to build a better future for our colleagues.

1 Scientists include "those who apply the science methods listed above within the natural, social, and physical sciences, engineering and health fields" (IAP Strategic Plan, p. 1). The term 'scientists' includes persons who are professionally engaged in and responsible for research and development – involving researchers, academics, students and others teaching, researching and/or studying at a university, scientific institution, organization or scientific workplace. The word science is used to refer to the systematic organization of knowledge that can be rationally explained and reliably applied. It is inclusive of the natural (including physical, mathematical and life) science and social (including behavioural and economic) science domains, as well as the humanities, medical, health, computer, and engineering sciences (ISC, 2018), <https://council.science/high-level-strategy/>

2 The definition of science, science assets and scientific enquiry is inclusive. It means knowledge and knowledge creation in all its forms and across every discipline. Science is "the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural, social, engineering and medical worlds following an iterative and systematic methodology based on evidence with experiment and/or observation as benchmarks for testing hypotheses." (IAP Strategic Plan, p. 1) Science systems include the elements, functions and contexts associated with universities, research institutes and non-governmental and governmental organizations, as well as related funding systems, structures, and incentives. Science systems are traditionally organized in, and produce knowledge and technology through, the natural sciences, social sciences, applied sciences, humanities and the arts, sometimes in collaboration with industry and commerce (ISC, 2021), <https://council.science/publications/unleashing-science-delivering-missions-for-sustainability/>

3 The term displaced, as defined by UNHCR (1946), "applies to a person who, as a result of the actions of the authorities of the régimes [...] has been deported from, or has been obliged to leave, his country of nationality or of former habitual residence, such as persons who were compelled to undertake forced labour or who were deported for racial, religious or political reasons."

4 According to the 1951 Convention on Refugees, a refugee is "someone who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

5 For example, the Geneva convention, the [OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#), and more, as well as the [UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers](#).

Articles of Commitment

1. Preserve the foundations of science and safeguard scientific enquiry, data and institutions.

Healthy and prosperous national scientific cultures contribute to expanding knowledge systems worldwide. The right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits is enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. For science to flourish and benefit societies, all countries must, in their own interest, provide safe spaces and systems for scientists to conduct research, and share and archive their findings, as well as ensure the protection and preservation of research objects, scientific infrastructure and scientific archives, including in instances of conflict.

2. Protect and support scientists and their work in the event of war and conflict, political upheaval and repression, natural and human-made disasters.

When scientists are threatened or forced into exile, their countries and the global research system risk losing the investment in their education, their knowledge and their potential for future research and discovery. Their skills are a precious resource; and all stakeholders must do their utmost to raise awareness of the need for meaningful and well-funded support programmes to provide such scientists with scholarships, short- and medium-term fellowships, visiting professorships and other placements; and to recognize the holistic needs of at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists. Governments must provide the appropriate visas, protection and practical support, without discrimination of any kind.

3. Support at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists to engage fully in advocacy and lobbying efforts; they are their own best advocates.

The voice and agency of at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists must be recognized and incorporated as a central component of any advocacy or support programme connected with this issue. Advocacy efforts should make clear that the skills they bring make positive contributions to their host countries while they are in exile and will be essential for rebuilding educational institutions and scientific capacity in their countries of origin.

4. Develop mechanisms aligned to global standards that will identify and endorse the skills, knowledge and professional credentials of at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists.

Many scientists forced into exile have not had the opportunity to develop to their full potential. In particular, countries often have specific requirements and regulations in highly specialized fields, such as engineering and medicine or other natural, social and human sciences. Pathways need to be created for displaced or refugee scholars and scientists to have their prior qualifications⁶ recognized and/or upgraded through opportunities to gain experience and additional skills. Authorities should be urged to streamline the recognition and accreditation processes of these scientists' pre-existing knowledge and skills, in compliance with the requirements of equality and non-discrimination. Language training and administrative support should be made available to ensure the inclusion and recognition of these scientists.

5. Safeguard the next generation of scientists by providing support programmes for students and early-career researchers who have been displaced or are in exile.

Building support structures for at-risk scientists in the undergraduate, graduate and early post-doctoral stages of their research careers is essential. Furthermore, efforts must be made to ensure that children and young people have opportunities to study, which includes facilitating access to higher education for those who are internally-displaced or are asylum seekers/refugees. Women face additional and significant challenges and require unique and tailored support structures.

6. Work towards rebuilding national scientific systems in the aftermath of conflict or disaster and support the voluntary, safe repatriation of scientists.

To reach its development targets under the Sustainable Development Goals⁷, every country needs thriving national scientific systems. In cases where such systems have been dismantled or destroyed, a time will come when it is possible to start rebuilding efforts. This will not only require international assistance to re-equip teaching and research infrastructure and develop bilateral exchange programmes, but also diplomatic efforts to enable and ensure the safe reintegration of scientists in the diaspora who wish to return to their countries of origin.

⁶ Students and scholars should work with their existing institutions and networks to ensure that electronic copies of the qualifications certifying the skill sets of at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists are safely stored. In compliance with Article 7 of the [Global Convention on Qualifications concerning Higher Education 2019, Paris, 25 November 2019](#) reasonable procedures should be established in receiving countries for fair and efficient assessment of skills if documentary evidence of the qualifications of displaced students, scholars or scientists cannot be proven.

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



[Science in Exile](#) is an initiative led by The World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries (UNESCO-TWAS), the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) and the International Science Council (ISC).

References

- Inspireurope (2020). Researchers at Risk: Mapping Europe's Response. Report of the Inspireurope Project. Accessed at: <https://sareurope.eu/sar-resources/inspireurope-report-researchers-at-risk-mapping-europes-response/>
- InterAcademy Partnership (2019). InterAcademy Partnership Strategic Plan 2019-2021. Accessed at: https://www.interacademies.org/sites/default/files/publication/iap_strategic_plan_2019-2021_approved.pdf
- Scholars at Risk Network (2019.II). How to Host: A Handbook for Higher Education Partners. Accessed at: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAR-How-to-Host-Handbook.pdf>
- UN General Assembly (1946). Refugees and Displaced Persons. 15 December 1946. A/RES/62. Accessed at: <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/bgares/3ae69ef14/refugees-displaced-persons.html#:~:text=The%20term%20%22displaced%20person%22%20applies,such%20as%20persons%20who%20were>
- UNHCR (2010). 1951 Convention on Refugees. Accessed at: <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

About the World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries (UNESCO-TWAS)

The World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries, founded in 1983, is a programme unit of UNESCO. Its principal aim is to promote scientific capacity and excellence for sustainable development in developing countries. Today, UNESCO-TWAS has more than 1,300 elected fellows — some of the world's most accomplished scientists and engineers — representing 108 countries; 11 of them are Nobel laureates.

UNESCO-TWAS and its partners offer over 600 research grants per year to scientists from the developing world, who want to pursue a doctoral degree and postdoctoral research. It also awards prizes that are among the most prestigious given for scientific work in the developing world. UNESCO-TWAS has five regional partners that help organize activities and disseminate information: in Alexandria, Egypt; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Beijing, China; Pretoria, South Africa; and Bangalore, India.

For more information about UNESCO-TWAS see <https://www.twas.org> and follow UNESCO-TWAS on Twitter <https://twitter.com/TWASnews>, LinkedIn <https://it.linkedin.com/company/twas-science>, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/TWAS.Science>, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/twasvideos> and Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/twas>.

About the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP)

Under the umbrella of the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), more than 140 national, regional and global member academies work together to support the vital role of science in seeking evidence-based solutions to the world's most challenging problems. In particular, IAP harnesses the expertise of the world's scientific, medical and engineering leaders to advance sound policies, improve public health, promote excellence in science education and achieve other critical development goals.

IAP's four regional networks in Africa (the Network of African Science Academies, NASAC), the Americas (the InterAmerican Network of Academies of Sciences, IANAS), Asia (the Association of Academies and Societies of Sciences in Asia, AASSA) and Europe (the European Academies' Science Advisory Council, EASAC) are responsible for managing and implementing many IAP-funded projects and help make IAP's work relevant around the world.

For more information about IAP see <https://www.interacademies.org> and follow IAP on Twitter <https://twitter.com/IAPpartnership>, LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/interacademypartnership> and YouTube <https://tinyurl.com/IAPyoutube>.

About the International Science Council (ISC)

The vision of the International Science Council is to advance science as a global public good. Scientific knowledge, data and expertise must be universally accessible and their benefits universally shared. The practice of science must be inclusive and equitable, as should opportunities for scientific education and capacity development.

The International Science Council (ISC) is a non-governmental organization with a unique global membership that brings together 40 international scientific Unions and Associations and over 140 national and regional scientific organizations including Academies and Research Councils.

For more information about ISC see <https://council.science/> and follow ISC on Twitter <https://twitter.com/ISC>, LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-science-council/>, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalScience/>, Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/council.science/> and YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/InternationalScienceCouncil>.