



ISC position on visas and online accessibility

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms a person's right to 'leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country' (Article 13.1).

However, measures taken by some national authorities to prevent illegal immigration can make the visa application process complex, expensive and unpredictable. This may interfere with international scientific meetings, events, teaching opportunities, and research collaborations, when scientists require visas for travel.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, conferences and teaching are increasingly conducted online. Some governments have placed restrictions on scientists to limit their participation in online gatherings, often citing concern for national security. These restrictions may serve to weaken international relationships between researchers, as well as creating inequalities in access to information and opportunities among scientists in different countries.

The right to engage in scientific enquiry, pursue and communicate knowledge, and to associate freely in such activities, is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ISC's [Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science](#). CFRS calls on national authorities to protect and respect the freedom of movement for scientists. Arbitrary visa restrictions and excessive regulation of participation in online meetings limit the sharing of knowledge between scientists, and the generation of new knowledge through international collaboration. Such restrictions may also create or exacerbate inequities between researchers from different countries, particularly regarding opportunities for career development and the capacity to contribute to scientific exchange and cooperation.

In accordance with ISC Statute 7, all ISC Members that organise or sponsor international scientific meetings – both online and in person – are expected to ensure that participation of scientists is free from discrimination of any kind. This means Members must consider the visa requirements of travelling scientists, as well as online accessibility for digital conferences, and should endeavour to ensure that equitable participation can be achieved for all participants. Individual scientists have a responsibility to comply with visa requirements and technology regulations, and should raise any issues they face with the relevant ISC Member.

ISC guidelines for international travel and visa issues

The ISC's Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science entails the freedom of movement, association, expression and communication for scientists, as well as equitable access to data, information, and other resources for research. In advocating the free and responsible practice of science, the Council promotes equitable opportunities for access to science and its benefits and opposes discrimination of any kind.

As guardian of the Principle of Freedom and Responsibility, the Committee for Freedom and Responsibility in Science has developed the following guidance for science-related travel.

Principles

- International scientific meetings, events, teaching opportunities or research collaborations arranged or sponsored by the ISC itself or its members must be free from discrimination in attendance based on political or other opinion, ethnic origin, language, religion, citizenship, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age. Such activities should therefore be designed with travel and online accessibility issues in mind.
- The right of bona fide scientists to undertake work-related travel outside their countries of residence is based on the assumption that they will return to their normal place of residence by the date indicated in their visas.

Recommendations

For event and meeting organizers:

- Prior to the selection of a country for a meeting, the relevant government authorities should be approached for assurances that they will facilitate entry visas for bona fide scientists to attend and fully participate in the meeting;
- Details of how and when to obtain visas in the initial information/invitation should be provided to travelling scientists with at least 6 months' notice;
- Be considerate of the varying issues facing researchers from different countries, and inform prospective participants to immediately report any difficulties related to their visa applications to the organizers;
- Report any difficulties relating to the issuing of visas without delay to the ISC Member sponsoring the meeting.

For meeting sponsors:

- Sponsoring bodies may seek information from CFRS on the past record of the intended host country regarding visa delivery for foreign scientists;
- In the event of difficulties in obtaining visas, the sponsoring ISC Member should intervene with the relevant authorities as appropriate, and inform CFRS at once.

For travelling participants:

- Visa applications should be made to the appropriate authorities in accordance with the timeframe provided by the meeting organizers. Visa requests by persons who apply in a country of current residence, which is not that of their citizenship, or whose country of residence/citizenship is experiencing political difficulties with the country hosting the meeting, may need to apply up to 6 months in advance of the meeting;
- Meeting participants should note that when traveling to a meeting destination involves passing through third countries, transit visas may be needed, applications for which may require up to 6 months' leeway. The applicable regulations need to be consulted prior to making travel plans;
- Provide the visa issuing authorities with all required documents. As evidence that financial means suffice to cover both travel expenses and the stay in the country that hosts the meeting, copies of bank statements, flight tickets and booked accommodation are usually



required. It is advisable to provide proof of health insurance. If the meeting organiser or the employer covers these costs, this should be documented appropriately. As evidence that they will return to your current country of residence after the meeting, students and PhD candidates should provide university enrolment documents and scientists employment contracts that are current;

- In cases of difficulties over visa applications, an intending participant should report the matter as soon as possible to the organizers of the meeting.