



**International  
Science Council**

The global voice for science

# **ISC Dues Revision Working Group Report**

*21 December 2025*

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## Executive summary

The objectives of the ISC Dues Revision Working Group established in 2024 were to:

1. Unify the two parallel dues systems of the ISC, inherited from the merger of ICSU and the ISSC in 2018; and
2. Address the question of affordable dues for organizations of limited means;

while preserving as much as possible the stability of the core income of the ISC.

The consultation of the Members in 2025 indicated that many Members experience some kind of difficulty paying the dues; several expressed concerns that the dues would rise; and many proposed 'inclusiveness' as a key characteristic of the dues system.

The Working Group considered three approaches to the revision of the dues structure:

- A. Applying the current majority system (the ICSU system) to all Members
- B. Applying the current majority system to all Members, with adjustments/corrections
- C. Revising the system

Each approach was considered according to the following criteria (see p.7):

1. Unification of the former ICSU and ISSC dues systems
2. Affordability for Members of limited means (inclusiveness)
3. Impact on ISC core (dues) income
4. Degree of change for Members, individually and collectively
5. Transparency (available for all to interrogate, comprehensible and reproducible)
6. Stability (the system minimizes abrupt changes in dues for Members over time)
7. Sustainability (the required data will be indefinitely available and openly accessible)
8. Simplicity (the system uses as few parameters as possible)

**Approach A**, the current ICSU system with integration of former ISSC Members, with refreshing of input data, sees significant downward movement of Members in the Category 2 scale due to evolutions in GDP and produces a drop in dues income for the ISC of ca. 13%.

**Approach B**, the ICSU system with adjustments to the bands and levels for Category 1 and 2 and introduction of an objective correction factor for low-income countries, does best on the criteria above, maintaining dues income for the ISC in principle (assuming that all or nearly all Members accept the new system). A small number of Members would see a very significant increase in dues but most Members would see no significant change or a downward change.

**Approach C** involved studying the feasibility and value of changing the basis of the dues system for both Category 1 and 2. For Category 1 the challenge was to collect comparable data from the Members; for Category 2 a number of alternative indicators and combinations of indicators were tested, without producing a result that responded any better to the criteria above than Approach B.

### Conclusions

1. The Dues Working Group concluded that Approach B was the most reasonable, achieving the objectives of the revision while minimizing change and meeting the other criteria listed above. Approach C introduced a significant level of complexity for a result that was not more satisfactory than Approach B.

2. It is proposed that in countries with multiple Members, each additional Member adds 5% to the base rate, to a maximum of €5k per additional Member, to defray the administrative costs of having multiple Members.
3. Whichever system is adopted, a set of framework conditions should be introduced for additional stability (see p.19).
4. The Dues Working Group recommends that the Committee for Membership consider and make a recommendation to the Governing Board on how to deal with Members which cannot or do not pay dues.
5. Assuming the revision of Category 1 and 2 dues is achieved, Category 3 dues will be addressed in a subsequent phase.

# 1. Background and process

The Dues Revision Working Group was established in mid-2024 with the mandate to develop proposals for a single, sustainable dues structure and associated dues scales and policies.

The specific objectives of the Working Group were to:

1. Unify the two parallel dues systems of the ISC, inherited from the merger of ICSU and the ISSC in 2018; and
2. Address the question of affordable dues for organizations of limited means;

while preserving the stability of the core income of the ISC.

Between October 2024 and January 2025, the Working Group discussed the scope of the challenge, studied the work done by the Ad Hoc Dues Committee in 2020–2021, including the report prepared for the 2021 General Assembly, and developed four core principles to underpin its approach to the revision of the ISC dues structure.

## **Box 1: Principles (December 2024)**

Income from membership dues is core to ISC operations, sustainability and independence. The following principles should apply to ISC members in Categories 1, 2, and 3. Category 4 members are exempt from paying dues and these principles do not apply.

1. ISC Members are expected to comply with the requirement to pay dues.
2. The membership dues of former ICSU and ISSC members should be consolidated into a single structure.
3. The dues structure should be tiered according to the financial strength of the Members and the category of membership. Factors in assessing financial strength need to be defined with input from ISC Members.
4. New Members should pay dues on a pro rata basis for the calendar year of admission.

These principles were presented at the General Assembly in Oman in January 2025.

The ISC membership was consulted formally in May–June 2025 for their agreement on the principles and for input on how the financial strength of different types of ISC member should be measured.

A summary of the responses is found in Annex A and the full set of responses is made available separately.

The Working Group has taken the responses to the consultation into account in preparing their analysis and conclusions. The Secretariat has also consulted external experts in the area of knowledge economy, indicators in S&T and composite indicators. An interim report was presented to the Committee for Finance, Compliance and Risk for comment, and this report is produced for the Governing Board.

The Working Group focused on Category 1 and 2 Members in this effort, deferring work on Category 3 to another phase. It also put aside questions of voting rights, considering that voting rights had been adjusted in the statutes revision of 2024 and the dues revision needed to work within that framework.

## Box 2: Overview of current ISC membership and dues

*Based on membership at 1 September 2025*

The ISC has four categories of member, three of which pay dues. Category 4 is an observers' category.

- Category 1 is composed of international scientific unions and associations, i.e. scientific discipline is the unifying feature. There are currently 38 Category 1 Members in good standing. The size of these organizations varies widely, with operating budgets of between €5k and over €1m.
- Category 2 is composed of organizations representing countries, regions or territories, i.e. geography is the unifying feature. There are currently 107<sup>1</sup> Category 2 Members in good standing, including 13 which benefitted from dues relief in 2024.
- Category 3 are other bodies, national or international, primarily composed of active scientists, which do not have the characteristics of Category 1 or 2 Members or which are young academies and associations. There are currently 48 such Members in good standing, including 19 young organizations that are currently exempt from dues.

In 2024 ca. 64% of the income of the ISC came from membership dues. In 2024 nearly 92% of that came from Category 2 Members; nearly 8% from Category 1 Members; and 0.55% from Category 3 Members. Among the Category 2 Members, 50% pay ca. €2k or less; 75% pay ca. €7k or less; 15% of Category 2 Members pay 85% of Category 2 dues.

The total amount of membership dues income is approximately €3 million per year. Since the establishment of the ISC, a 2% increase to compensate for inflation has been applied in all years but one (during the COVID pandemic) to offset rising costs due to inflation. Despite this, the annual income from membership dues has not risen.

The dues paid to the ISC by former Members of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the International Council for Science (ICSU) are based on their respective dues structures before their merger in 2018. The two organizations had comparable dues structure logics, whereby Members were grouped according to either their income levels *or* the economic strength of their country or region. In each group level ('band') Members paid the same amount of dues. The level of dues of ISSC members was significantly lower than the levels for ICSU members. These parallel dues structures continue to exist. In addition, some Members which were formerly members of both ISSC and ICSU continue to pay the dues of both organizations.

It was intended that a new dues structure would be proposed to Members at the General Assembly in October 2021. However, in 2021 the Governing Board had to conclude that the dues structure could not be revised until certain issues surrounding membership had been resolved, chiefly the around the admission of second or third members in a country with an existing member. The dues structures and rates of the former ICSU and ISSC members therefore continued to be applied in the period 2022–2024, and then again into 2025.

Largely due to the complicated inheritance of the merger of ICSU and the ISSC, it is also the case that multiple Members in the same country, of which there are currently 32 across 14 countries, pay dues in at least three different ways (that is, paying a single fee per country; paying a

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<sup>1</sup> Made up of ca. 70 academies of science, ca. 20 research councils or research-performing organizations, 5 ministries, 5 universities, 5 national or international networks.

surcharge for a second member; one paying the former ISCU and one the former ISSC dues; or even a mixture of the above).

### The basis of the dues calculations

Category 1 Members are sorted into four bands according to their average income from membership fees over the previous three years. If their membership fees income falls within a certain range, they pay the associated dues for that band:

Band	Range (EUR) in membership dues income	Dues (EUR) 2025	No. members in band
A	300k and above	26,087	5 <sup>2</sup>
B	240k–300k	13,045	1
C	55k–240k	4,303	16
D	10k–55k	1,478	9
NA	Former ISSC members	1656 or less	7

Category 2 Members are sorted into 10 bands based on the GDP of their country or region relative to global GDP, averaged over the three most recent years for which data on the GDP of all countries in the world are available. If the percentage of a country's GDP relative to global GDP falls within a certain range, the Member from that country pays the associated dues for that band.

Band	Range in % global GDP	Dues (EUR) 2025	No. members in band
10	>20	603,365	1
9	10–20	262,788	1
8	4.5–10	252,375	2
7	3–4.5	164,592	4
6	2-3	68,580	3
5	1-2	48,006	5
4	0.5–1	17,885	10
3	0.15–0.5	6,858	20
2	0.05–0.15	2,017	16
1	<0.15	1,346	31
NA	Former ISC members	11,000 or less	11

*Note: For both Category 1 and 2, the data on which the Members' places in the bands is based has not been refreshed since before the creation of the ISC in 2018.*

Category 3 Members (other than the exempt organizations of young scientists) pay a fixed fee, which stands at €563 in 2025.

<sup>2</sup> One member is voluntarily in Band A rather than Band B.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Context

The ISC dues structure revision is being carried out in a context of tight science budgets around the world. The aim of the revision is not to increase overall revenue from membership dues; however, ideally the revision will not result in a significant drop in membership dues income for the ISC, which would impact on its capacity to deliver on its mission and priorities. The ISC already supplements its core income with external, project-based funding (to about one third of its total annual income)<sup>3</sup>, and benefits from considerable in-kind support of various kinds. Efforts to diversify income streams for the ISC have been successful and are intensifying, to help relieve pressure on the Members.

In this context, the key objectives of the revision are to:

1. Unify the two parallel dues systems of the ISC, inherited from the merger of ICSU and the ISSC;
2. Address the question of affordable dues for organizations of limited means;

while preserving as much as possible the stability of the core income of the ISC. An assumption in the exercise has therefore been that the dues system should produce a target income of ca. €3.1m with the existing membership.

In addition, from an administrative point of view, any membership dues system should be:

- Transparent: Available for all members and potential members to see and interrogate.
- Stable: Minimizing significant change in dues for any Member and for the ISC from year to year, and not needing frequent adjustment.
- Sustainable: Based on trusted sources of data that will be readily available in the medium to long term.
- Simple: Using as few parameters as possible, for ease of understanding, acceptability and applicability by the secretariat. More parameters and complexity should not be introduced for a result that could be arrived at more simply.

The consultation of the Members indicated that many Members have experienced some kind of difficulty paying the dues; several expressed concerns that the dues would rise; and many identified inclusiveness as a key feature of the dues system.

With these desiderata in mind, the Working Group considered three approaches to the revision of the dues structure:

- A. Applying the current majority system (the 'ICSU system') to all Members
- B. Applying the current majority system to all Members, with adjustments
- C. Revising the system

The implications of the three approaches are summarized in Table 1 and then discussed in more detail below, followed by a set of considerations and proposals on cross-cutting issues.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2024 the ISC received some €1.4m in external funding, which covered *i.a.* 18% of its personnel costs.

Table 1: Summary of advantages and disadvantages of three approaches

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>A. Applying current majority system</b> Integration of the minority former ISSC Members into the majority system, with updating of all Members' placement in the dues bands based on the most recent data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Already in place</li> <li>• System is familiar to Members, and is based on measures of financial strength of Members</li> <li>• Few Members would see their dues rise</li> <li>• Transparent, simple, sustainable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results in a highly significant drop in core revenue for the ISC</li> <li>• Does not correct anomalies and disproportionalities in the system (described under each membership category)</li> <li>• Vulnerable to dramatic change depending on evolutions in GDP.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B. Adjusting current system</b> Applying the basic majority system, with updating of all Members' placement in the dues bands based on the most recent data, with certain adjustments to the bands/levels, and application of a correction factor to deal with low-income countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to implement</li> <li>• System is familiar to Members, and is based on financial strength of Members</li> <li>• Corrects certain anomalies and disproportionalities in the dues scales</li> <li>• More than 80% of Members would see no increase or a decline in dues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of Members would see their dues rise significantly</li> </ul>
<p><b>C. Revising the system</b> Applying different and/or mixed methods of assessing financial strength of Members and attributing levels of dues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could offer more legitimate representation of financial strength of Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large number of Members could see their dues change, in both directions</li> <li>• Data collection for calculation of dues could be more complicated</li> <li>• Composite indices would be less easy for Members to understand and for the Secretariat to apply in the future</li> <li>• Possibly a longer-term effort, requiring a multi-year transition</li> </ul>

## 2.2. Approach A: Applying the current majority system

### Conceptual and methodological approach

In Approach A, former ISSC Members are integrated into the majority (former ICSU) system, and all Members' places in Category 1 and 2 bands are revised based on the most recent data on Members' own membership income (2021–2024) and on GDP as proportion of global GDP (2022–2024), respectively.

All special arrangements for individual Members are dismissed, so that every Member starts from an original position.

### Main implications

#### *Category 1*

- A very small number of former ICSU Members change bands (in both directions) following evolutions in their own membership dues income.
- Nine former ISSC Members are slotted into the appropriate band based on their membership dues income.
- Two Members which were members of both ICSU and the ISSC pay one set of dues only.
- In sum, about three-quarters of Cat. 1 Members would pay roughly the same or less than in 2025, while about one-quarter would pay more. The collective result would be a net increase of about €40k (ca. 17%) in Category 1 dues for the ISC.

#### *Category 2*

- Some 10 Members, including 5 in the higher bands, would drop down a band due to evolutions in GDP, with a highly significant negative impact on revenue for the ISC (ca. €365k or 13% of Category 2 dues income).
- A small number of Members would move up a band.
- Some Members currently paying a double fee for ICSU and ISSC membership would pay a single country fee (i.e. together would pay less than previously).
- The calculation is for a country/territory, rather than for an organization, therefore some Members would be required to split the fee between them.

**Category 3** Members continue to pay a flat rate.

### Conclusions on Approach A

This option achieves the integration of former ICSU and ISSC Members into one system. It begins to address the issue of affordable dues, in the sense that updating the input data for Category 1 and 2 puts many Members in the appropriate bands in relation to their financial strength as currently measured. However, this option would produce a very significant drop in core revenue for the ISC.

In general, a downward movement of Cat. 2 Members in the bands can be expected, as high-income countries' share of global GDP declines relative to that of faster-growing middle- and low-income economies. This implies that the thresholds between the bands need periodic review and that attention needs to be given to conditions for moving between bands.

A similar process in the reverse direction could affect the Cat. 1 Members, as over time some would cross a threshold into a higher band as their own dues income very gradually increases while the thresholds are static. The thresholds for this category should therefore also periodically be reset.

## 2.3. Approach B: Adjusting the current system

### Conceptual and methodological approach

In Approach B, the basic system is maintained, and former ISSC Members are integrated into the majority system as in Approach A, but adjustments are made to some band ranges and levels in order to (1) avoid a drop in core income for the ISC, and (1) correct certain anomalies and disproportionalities.

### Main implications

#### Category 1

As identified in the report of the Ad Hoc Dues Committee in 2021, the four-band dues structure for Category 1 Members is not well suited to the great range in financial strength of the ca. 40 disciplinary organizations ('financial strength' being defined as the organizations' own income from membership dues). Membership dues income of Category 1 Members varies by a factor of more than 250, from less than €4k to over €1m (see Box 3, p.10). In such a system, organizations with vastly different levels of membership-based income find themselves in the same band, paying the same amount of dues.

A simulation was run for Category 1 Members (based on real and extrapolated data) with eight bands in the dues scale instead of four, to reduce the big steps between bands. The thresholds between bands and the levels of dues were set to keep the dues at between 2.5% and 5.0% of Members' own dues income (instead of the current range of 1.75%–9%), with a maximum of €26k for the top band and a minimum of €500 for the bottom band. In practice, most Members would pay 3%–4% (on average 3.5%) of their membership income in dues to the ISC.

This simulation produces more but more moderate changes compared to Approach 1. A dozen organizations would see upward changes, of which some would be significant, while about two thirds would see their dues stay stable or decline. Collectively, income from Category 1 dues would decrease slightly.

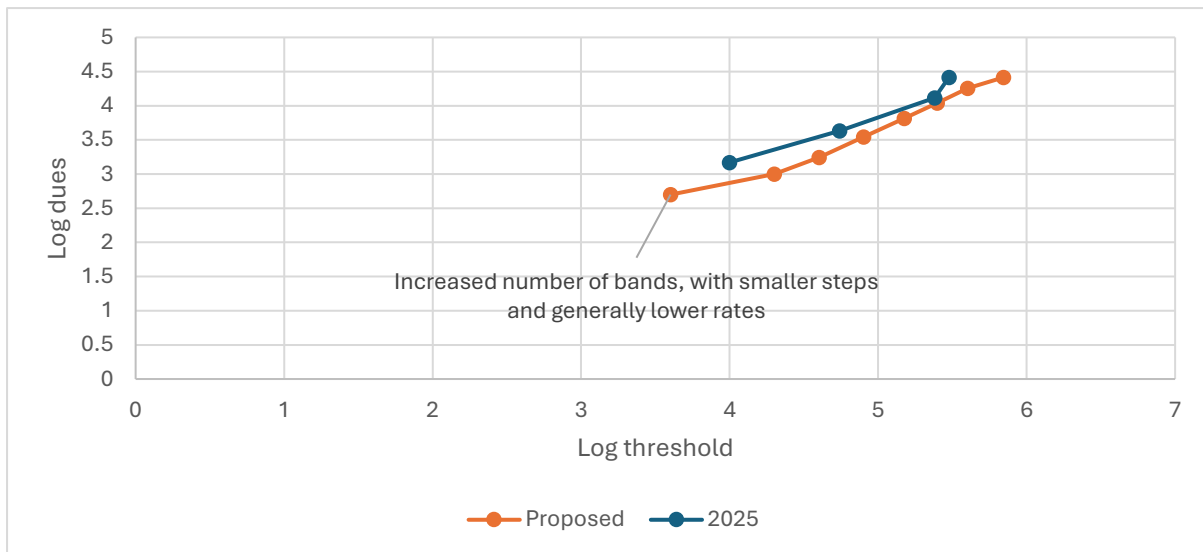
*Table 2a: Current Category 1 band system*

Band	Range (EUR) in membership dues income	Dues (EUR)
A	300k and above	26,087
B	240k–300k	13,045
C	55k–240k	4,303
D	10k–55k	1,478

*Table 2b: Proposed Category 1 band system*

Band	Range (EUR) in membership dues income	Dues (EUR)
A	700k and above	26000
B	400k–700k	18000
C	250k–400k	11000
D	150k–250k	6500
E	80k–150k	3500
F	40k–80k	2000
G	20k–40k	1000
H	4k–20k	500

Figure 1: Plot of the log of dues rates against the log of the threshold for the band, for the current scale and the proposed scale. A straight line indicates proportionality.



### Box 3: Category 1 Members' financial models

By mid-September 2025 the secretariat had received financial data for the period 2021–2024 from 31 (of 41) Category 1 Members, and found partial data for one further Member online. 23 Members provided their full financial reports, but some declined to share full reports and declared only the amounts of their membership dues income.

The sample of 32 Category 1 Members shows *i.a.* that:

1. The membership dues income of Category 1 Members varies by a factor of more than 250, from less than €4,000 to over €1m. The median value is ca. €125k and the mean is €193k.
2. From the smaller sample of 23 Members which provided fuller financial data, it can be seen that membership dues income of Category 1 Members represents between 10% and 90% of Members' total income – illustrating the wide variety in operating and financial models.

### Category 2

Starting with the result produced in Approach A, the following adjustments to the system were made:

- The maximum level of dues for band 10 was set at €615k. There is only one Member in this band, which will be paying ca. 20% of invoiced dues. The dues levels for other bands were rounded off to even figures.
- The majority of Members which have difficulties paying dues and which request waivers or reductions are in the lowest band, paying €1,346 in 2025. The theoretical starting level was therefore lowered slightly to €1,250.
- The lower value of the range for three bands (band 8, 7 and 4) was lowered to avoid several slippages of Members into lower bands following evolutions in shares of global GDP.
- The level of dues was adjusted significantly upwards for two bands (band 9 and band 6), to make for a more proportionate relationship between the measure of financial strength

(national percentage of global GDP) and dues across the bands. This would impact significantly on two Members.

- Some Members would stay in the same bands but pay less than currently because they would pay only one set of dues rather than two (for ICSU and ISSC).

These adjustments would nominally produce an increase of ca. €220k in the dues from Category 2, as many Members, including in low- and middle-income countries, would move up in the bands based on evolutions in their national share of GDP. However, a correction factor for low- and middle-income countries is proposed:

**Correction factor:** Members in countries in the [DAC list of Overseas Development Aid \(ODA\)](#) recipients classified as **low- or lower-middle-income countries** would be eligible to request to move down one band. Members already in Band 1 which make a request on this basis could pay a nominal fee of €500.

Assuming that all eligible Members request the application of this correction factor, most of the nominal increase in the collective membership dues for the ISC in this scenario would be neutralized, leaving a theoretical increase of ca. €60k, which would offset the decrease in Category 1 dues.

In this approach, only a small number of Category 2 Members would see an increase in dues; the majority would either see no change or a decrease.

*Figure 2: Relationship of Category 2 dues bands (lower bound) to national percentage of global GDP. A straight line indicates proportionality.)*

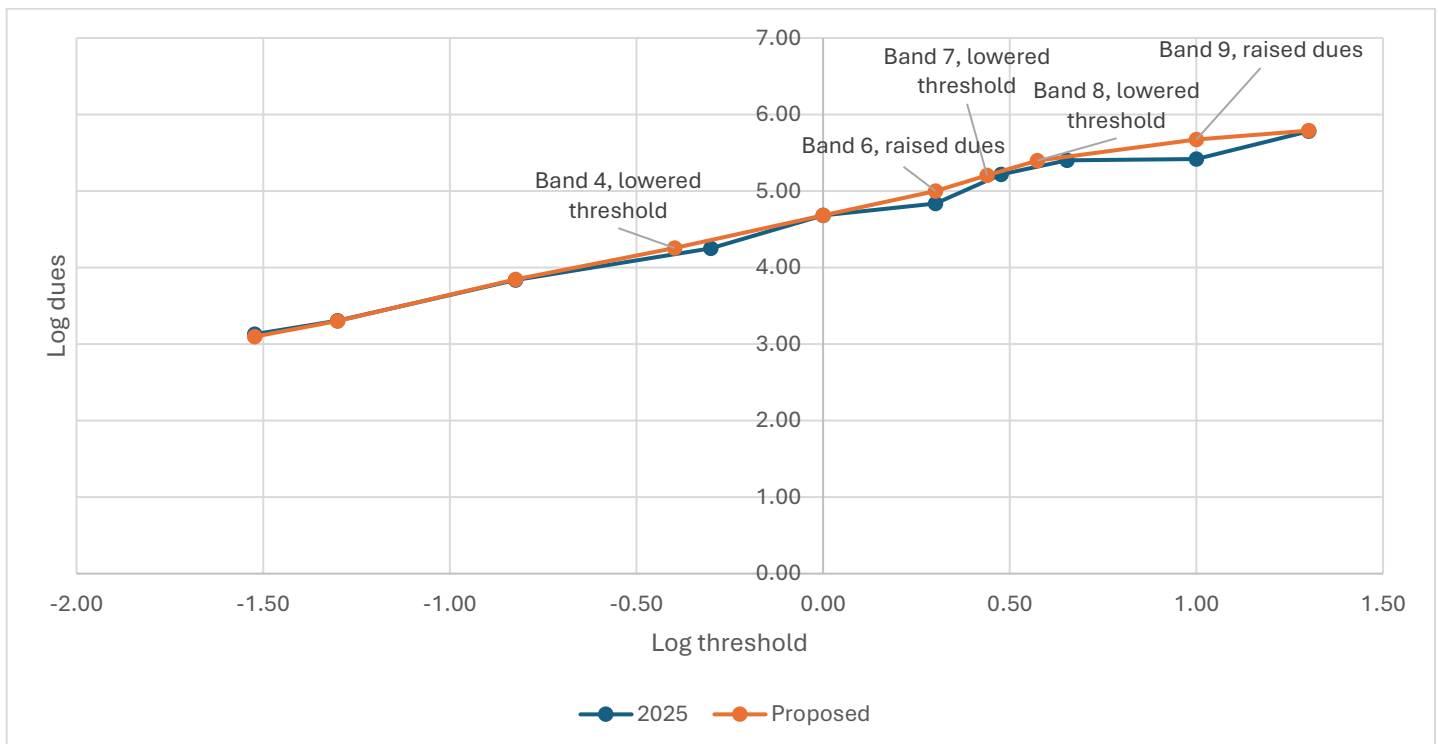


Table 3: Showing the proposed changes in ranges corresponding to bands and the proposed levels of dues (and the significant changes in red font)

Band	Range in % global GDP	2025	Ratio band x /Band 10	Range in % global GDP	Proposed		Number of countries in band
		Dues (EUR)			Dues (EUR)	Ratio band x /Band 10	
10	≥20	603,365	1.0000	≥20.00	615,000	1.0000	1
9	≥10.00	262,788	0.4355	≥10.00	470,000	0.7317	1
8	≥4.5	252,375	0.4183	≥3.75	250,000	0.3984	2
7	≥3	164,592	0.2728	≥2.75	160,000	0.2602	3
6	≥2	68,580	0.1137	≥2.00	100,000	0.1626	3
5	≥1	48,006	0.0796	≥1.00	48,000	0.0780	6
4	≥0.5	17,885	0.0296	≥0.4	18,000	0.0293	13
3	≥0.15	6,858	0.0114	≥0.15	7,000	0.0114	16
2	≥0.05	2,017	0.0033	≥0.05	2,000	0.0033	18
1	<0.05	1,346	0.0022	<0.05	1,250	0.0020	25

For stability in the future, it is proposed that any downward movement in the bands be conditional on the addition of two factors: decline in national share of global GDP and decline in absolute GDP. This would prevent the situation that countries slip down the scale as global GDP evolves, even while their own GDP is growing. Similarly, upward movement could be moderated by certain factors (see Section 3, General Conclusions).

### Category 3

Category 3 bodies are diverse and currently pay a flat fee (€563 in 2025). No change is proposed for Category 3 in this approach, other than the recommendation that the placement of Members in all categories be reviewed by the Membership Committee to identify whether some Members would be better placed in another category to the one they are currently in.

Young associations and academies should continue to pay no dues, or only on a voluntary basis.

### Conclusions on Approach B

Overall, this approach is pragmatic and represents an advance on Approach A as it corrects certain anomalies and disproportionalities in the scales; introduces a objective correction factor to help Category 2 Members in low-income countries; minimizes change for the majority of Members; and maintains, in principle, ISC core revenue. The new scales would be scaffolded by a set of rules (see Section 3 General conclusions) to govern the eventual movement of Members between bands and other aspects of the system.

## 2.4. Approach C: Revising the dues structure

### Introduction

The third approach to revising the dues structure was to test alternative measures of the relative financial strength of ISC Members, always with the aim of reaching a target level of membership dues of ca. €3.1m.

The current system of dues is based on proxy measures of financial strength which have various weaknesses, as discussed below.

### Category 1

The financial strength of Category 1 Members is currently defined as the organization's own membership dues income (self-declared and averaged over the previous three years).

The key issue identified with this measure is that membership dues represent a variable proportion of the disposable income of Category 1 Members, from 100% to as little as 10% for organizations whose main income is from congresses and/or publications/royalties. It is also noted that some Members receive significant in-kind funding in the form of hosting and staffing arrangements.

Many responses to the consultation of Members suggested that the financial strength of Category 1 Members should take into account the operating budget of the organization, and some suggested looking at the reserves or investment portfolio of the organization.

Challenges in pursuing these suggestions are that:

- A significant part of non-membership dues revenue of some Members is grant-based or exceptional, and may be entirely restricted to certain activities; it may also cause significant fluctuations in income that would not be adequately dealt with by averaging over a small number of years.
- For some Members, a bi-, tri- or quadrennial event is the major source of income – even with averaging over a period, this could distort the picture of the financial strength of an organization.
- It has proved very challenging, if not impossible, for the Secretariat to collect full and comparable financial data from all ca. 40 Category 1 Members for the purposes of the dues revision.

Based on (incomplete) current information, membership dues income seems to represent the major part of revenue for the majority of Category 1 Members and could be considered the most comparable factor across them.

An alternative to a banded/tiered structure would be to apply a simple percentage (e.g. 3.5%) to each organization's membership dues income. Dues would change periodically (every four years), but be strictly proportionate to membership dues income. The Working Group recognized the advantages of the flat rate but favoured a banded approach, for consistency.

### Category 2

The financial strength of Category 2 Members is currently defined as the national share of global GDP in current US dollars (based on internationally accepted World Bank statistics and averaged over the previous three years). Note that a dozen countries have multiple members of the ISC, with a variety

of ways of calculating the dues for those organizations due to the legacy of the merger of ICSU and ISSC.

The key issue with this measure is that the size of an economy as measured by GDP, even as a share of global GDP, is not straightforwardly linked to a country's per capita wealth or investment in research or to the budget of Category 2 Members.

In the Member consultation, some 35–40 Members suggested using some combination of economic, science system and institutional criteria for a truer representation of the financial strength of a Category 2 organization, for example:

- National economic criteria, chiefly GDP, GNI, GDP or GNI per capita, GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP)
- Science system criteria, chiefly gross expenditure on R&D, size of research population, scientific output (number of publications)
- Institutional criteria, chiefly gross income/operating budget and number of members/fellows of the Member organization

Each of these indicators in its own right has pros and cons (see also Annex 2):

- Some indicators may be available for all countries but not universally accepted as appropriate for the given purpose (e.g. number of papers in proprietary databases);
- Others may be relevant and accepted, but not available for all countries (e.g. researcher population or gross expenditure on R&D, which is not available for more than 20 ISC member countries);
- Gross expenditure on R&D may seem to be a better indicator of the size of a country's science system than national share of GDP, but taken on its own gives only a partial picture of scientific capacity.
- GDP or GNI in purchasing power parity might seem a fairer measure than GDP in current USD but could disadvantage lower-income countries;
- GNI (Gross National Income) may be a truer reflection of the size of the economy for a very small number of countries, but applying it as the basis of the dues instead of GDP would change the band for only two Members, one upwards, one downwards.
- GDP or GNP per capita shows the level of development of a country but not its overall size;
- Data on the actual budget of Category 2 organizations would be very challenging to collect in a meaningful and comparable way, given the diversity of Members in Category 2;
- Many organizations in Category 2 do not have members or fellows.

A number of simulations were run, including:

**a. Dues based directly on the national share of GDP (not banded)**

With a cap on the contribution of the USA at 20%, the dues would fall significantly for six Members at the top of the scale as well as for many at the bottom of the scale, and to compensate, would rise for about half the Member countries, with an average increase of 164%. The degree of change in this scenario is therefore very high.

**b. Dues based on the UN scale of member state contributions**

The UN scale is based on GNI, adjusted for levels of indebtedness and per capita income. Applied to ISC Members, with a cap on the contribution of the USA of 22%, would result in most of the Members at the top and the bottom paying significantly less than they do now (other than China, which would have to more than double its contribution), while the Members in the middle bands would pay significantly more than they currently do. The

decrease for the high-income nations at the top of the ISC scale would be moderated in this scenario compared to the above, because of the effect of the adjustments for indebtedness and per capita income, while the lower-income countries would decrease even more. The degree of change in this scenario is very high.

**c. Dues based on a composite index**

Discussions with three external experts on S&T indicators confirmed that combining indicators of any kind involves decisions of a political nature, in addition to the technical issues mentioned above. The weighting of components of any composite index involves some measure of subjectivity.

Following a suggestion of one of the experts consulted, Dr. Guillermo Lemarchand, an experiment was run with the following combination of indicators:

- share of world GDP and share of world scientific articles<sup>4</sup>, in the ratio 2:1.

Applying this formula to Category 2 Members, with the target budget of €2.9m, produced a similar pattern to both of the simulations above, with significant decreases in theoretical dues for the countries at the top and bottom of the ISC scale (although with some nuances), but also many high relative increases for middle income countries (e.g. increases of 160% for Egypt and Malaysia, 69% for Kenya, 60% for Iraq, 54% for Nigeria).

However, taking as a principle that the ISC dues systems should be banded, the ranked list of countries produced by the formula was mapped onto the Category 2 dues scale with a target dues level of €2.9m, to understand the impact on individual Members. The number of Members that change bands is very small, and is comparable to Approach B.

***Category 3 (other bodies primarily representing active scientists)***

Category 3 bodies are diverse and currently pay a flat fee (€563 in 2025). They have voting rights since 2024, which could justify a more tailored dues structure. It would be necessary to collect financial information from each of them to be able to make a proper analysis.

As suggested above under Approach B, the placement of Members in Category 3 should be reviewed. Young scientist organizations should continue to pay no dues, or only on a voluntary basis, and it should be clarified whether they should have voting rights on financial matters (voting rights on financial matters being a function of the level of dues paid).

In the future, any Category 3 bodies which are membership bodies could pay dues on the same basis as Category 1 Members, but with an adjustment to take account of their different voting rights (Category 3 Members collectively have 20% of the full vote). Other bodies could pay dues on the basis of their operating budget.

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<sup>4</sup> Number of scientific articles was selected for the experiment because it scales well with other indicators of the size of science system, i.e. gross expenditure on R&D and number of researchers per country, and, unlike those indicators, is available for all countries. This indicator (citable documents) was sourced from <https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?year=2024>.

#### **Box 4: Alternative dues systems**

##### **All European Academies (ALLEA)**

ALLEA's dues structure is based on GDP in absolute terms, and its 47 member academies are sorted into seven bands representing ranges of GDP and paying a set amount of dues.

For the middle to top bands, a correction is applied on the basis of GDP per capita – if the GDP per capita of any particular member in a given band is under a certain level, it is allowed to move into the band below.

##### **European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC)**

For the membership-based part of its budget, EASAC has recently moved from a system of voluntary contributions to a transparent, structured system, based on GNI, with eight bands for its 29 member academies. It is possible to negotiate a lower rate for special cases.

##### **Science Europe**

Science Europe's 40 members are national research funding organizations. Their membership fees are based on a percentage of their research budget, which is calculated to produce the budget that the organization needs to deliver its costed work plan. There is a minimum and a maximum amount that members can pay as a percentage of the overall budget. It was noted that the administrative burden of collecting comparable information on the research budgets of the members is significant.

#### **Conclusions on Approach C**

Finding a robust alternative indicator or combination of indicators that works across all Members in a given membership category and which will be applicable into the future, is a perennial problem.

The analysis for Category 1 Members is not complete, but it seems likely that membership dues income is the most comparable indicator available.

Regarding Category 2, any alternative indicator or combination of indicators is likely to produce very significant change for virtually all Members if dues are a direct function of the indicator (i.e. not banded), and will produce some changes that are generally considered reasonable and others that would be considered undesirable. In a banded system, the absolute and relative positions of organizations matter less than which band an organization falls into; in the simulations with various indicators and weightings, the position of ISC Members in a ten-band scale was quite stable. The gains in fairness or legitimacy of alternative measures of the financial strength of ISC Category 2 Members, translated into a banded dues scale, are therefore not clear.

The dues of Category 3 members, other than young scientist organizations, should be the basis of a dedicated study.

### 3. General conclusions

As one Member representative at the ISC General Assembly suggested, it may be advisable to proceed in a step-wise fashion with the revision of the membership dues structure, i.e. changing as little as possible with each step towards a more appropriate system.

Approach B, accompanied by a clear and systematic basis for considering requests for relief (a correction factor based on a universally accepted indicator), would offer a pragmatic compromise between the current system and a more complex system with uncertain gains in fairness or legitimacy, and which would involve a greater administrative burden and a longer implementation period. Approach B should maintain core revenue for the ISC, and would be simple, stable, sustainable and transparent.

There are some general considerations for whichever system goes forward:

1. No single Member should pay more than 22% of total membership dues income.
2. Adjustments for inflation could be proposed once in a budgeting cycle (e.g. four years), rather than every year.
3. Thresholds between bands should be reviewed once in a planning cycle (four years).
4. Dues should continue to be calculated on the basis of three-year averages of data.
5. Members should only move upwards in the bands if the basis for the move is valid for two budgeting cycles, and the new level of dues should be applied progressively to the Member over three years.
6. Category 2 Members should not change bands downwards unless two conditions are fulfilled:
  - Their percentage of global GDP declines below the threshold of a band
  - Their absolute GDP has fallen relative to the previous four-year planning cycle and then the new level of dues should be reached progressively over three years.
7. Members whose dues do fall could be asked to contribute the difference for one year into a solidarity fund to cover the dues or participation of Members of limited means.
8. Members in the lowest band of their category which apply for dues relief based on the correction factor could pay a nominal fee of €500 ('Level 0').
9. Any exceptions to the base rates should be agreed only for the duration of the budget cycle, and then be reset and renegotiated if appropriate.
10. A discussion process should be facilitated by the ISC when there are multiple Members in one country, to help them split the dues and voting rights.
11. Second and additional Category 2 Members in any country could generate a surcharge of 5% for each additional member, to a limit of €5,000 per additional member.
12. The Membership Committee should review the placement of Members in the various categories and also consider how to deal with existing or prospective Members which cannot or do not pay dues.
13. The revised dues structure should be implemented as of 2027, in order to give Members time to plan and budget.

## Annex 1: Summary of the input from the consultation of Members in June 2025

One hundred and nine (111) Members responded to the consultation on the revision of the membership dues structure in May-June 2025, representing 21 Category 1 Members, 66 Category 2 Members, 20 Category 3 Members (of which 9 'young scientist' Members), and 4 Category 4 Members.

### General feedback

1. One-hundred and one (101) Members expressed agreement with the principles, while eight Members expressed some level of reserve.
2. About half indicated that they had experienced some kind of challenge in paying ISC membership dues. The explanations referred to the level of the dues, internal cash flow issues and exchange rate volatility. Several Members cautioned that an increase in dues could result in Members leaving or organizations being excluded.
3. Several comments indicated that the Members wished or needed to see or report on the value or tangible benefits of their membership for their (national science) community.
4. The relationship of dues to voting rights was raised several times, with some Members suggesting that voting rights should be more closely linked to the level of financial contribution.
5. Terms frequently used to describe a desirable dues structure: transparent; tailored; adaptive; flexible; inclusive; fair.
6. Some Members suggested that the target total revenue from dues should take as a point of departure the budget needed by the ISC to fulfil its functions/implement its work plan.
7. Several voices suggested that the ISC should take in-kind contributions of Members as partial payment of dues.
8. The fact that some Category 2 Members also contribute financially to some Category 1 Members, which then pay ISC membership dues, was raised by ca. 3–4 Members as being anomalous.
9. Some Members suggested that those with greater financial capacity could be encouraged to pay more than the theoretical level of dues, potentially to contribute to a solidarity fund for Members which cannot pay.
10. Currency and exchange rate volatility and exceptional national circumstances (e.g. economic crises or natural disasters) were raised; it was suggested that the dues be invoiced in local currency equivalents, or that ISC incorporate currency adjustment mechanisms in dues calculations for members from countries with high exchange rate volatility.
11. Some comments from low-income Members concerned the need for financial support from the ISC for their own activities or science in their region (e.g. seed funding, travel support).

### **Feedback on Category 1 (unions and associations)**

The majority (16 of ca. 22) pertinent comments from all respondents suggested that dues of Category 1 Members should be calculated on the basis of the organizations' gross income/operating budget (sometimes in combination with other factors).

Among the 21 Category 1 Members who responded to the poll, 6 recommended maintaining membership income only as the basis for ISC dues, and 10 recommended using gross income/operating budget (alone or in combination with factors such as membership income, gross income/operating budget and numbers of members). Several voices argued against taking number of members into account.

One suggestion was for an 'incentivized voluntary contribution', whereby Members can elect to pay higher dues in order to have greater voting or other rights.

### **Feedback on Category 2 (national/territorial/regional)**

Ca. 18 Members suggested that Category 2 Members' dues should be based on GDP alone; some suggested that there should be flexibility for Members which demonstrably do not have a budget that would allow them to pay the national rate of dues.

Some 35–40 Members suggested some combination of combination of economic, science system and institutional criteria:

- Economic criteria included GDP, GDP per capita and GDP in purchasing power parity
- Science system criteria included national expenditure on R&D, size of research population, number of publications
- Institutional criteria included gross income/operating budget and number of members/fellows

Several voices questioned how to divide the dues for a country between multiple Members and indicated that it should not be left to the Members in a given country to decide.

### **Feedback on Category 3 (other national/international organizations of active scientists)**

The vast majority of pertinent responses suggested that dues of Category 3 Members should be linked to the organization's income, whether gross income or membership dues or a mix, possibly on the model of Cat. 1 or Cat. 2 if they resemble this kind of organization. However, only two Category 3 Members made any concrete suggestion (in both cases suggesting gross income as the basis).

It was suggested that the level of dues should reflect the fact that Category 3 Members' votes collectively are 20% of the vote.

Many young academies and associations (which were offered free membership to facilitate entry in 2023) indicated that this subset of Members could/should not pay dues other than on a voluntary basis.

### **Feedback on Category 4 (other organizations, including ISC Affiliated Bodies)**

The membership was not consulted on Category 4 membership dues, but two Category 4 Members indicated that this category should continue not to pay dues.

## Annex 2: Potential alternatives to GDP as a basis for calculating Category 2 membership dues

*Note prepared by the ISC Secretariat, June 2025*

Instead of basing (part of) the calculation of dues for category 2 members on the size of their corresponding country's economy, it may be preferable to base membership dues on the size of the national or regional science system.

This document describes a set of indicators that could be used as measures (either individually or jointly) of the size of national or regional science systems corresponding to category 2 ISC Members. While there are many possible metrics to indicate the size of a given science system, the candidates listed below can readily be calculated using publicly available data with global coverage. Normalized indicators (either by GDP or researcher population) are preferred as these are comparable across countries and regions.

### Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a proportion of GDP

<b>Definition</b>	Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP is the total intramural expenditure on R&D performed in the national territory during a specific reference period expressed as a percentage of GDP of the national territory.
<b>Calculation</b>	Total domestic intramural expenditure on R&D during a given year divided by the GDP (i.e. the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy, including distributive trades and transport, plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products) and multiplied by 100.
<b>Source</b>	<a href="#">UNESCO UIS</a> <sup>5</sup>
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collected and reported consistently by UNESCO, OECD, and national statistical agencies.</li> <li>• Shows how much of a country's economic resources are devoted to research.</li> <li>• Standardized by GDP, it allows meaningful comparisons between countries of different sizes.</li> <li>• Often correlates with the capacity to generate scientific knowledge (e.g. publications).</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not show how R&amp;D is distributed across sectors (basic vs applied, public vs private).</li> <li>• Sensitive to GDP fluctuations. In times of economic downturn, GERD as a % of GDP may appear artificially high if GDP falls faster than R&amp;D spending. Conversely, rapid GDP growth can make R&amp;D investment seem stagnant even if nominal spending is rising.</li> <li>• Favours countries with strong industrial R&amp;D (e.g. South Korea, Germany), potentially underestimating smaller or public-sector-heavy science systems.</li> <li>• GERD data may be incomplete or outdated in low-income or politically unstable countries.</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> For more information see: <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/bgdocs/UIS-RD-Database-Background-Information-EN-Feb-2025-Data-Release.pdf>

## Researchers (in full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants

<b>Definition</b>	Number of professionals engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge (who conduct research and improve or develop concepts, theories, models, techniques instrumentation, software or operational methods) during a given year expressed as a proportion of a population of one million.
<b>Calculation</b>	Number of researchers during a given year divided by the total population (using mid-year population as reference) and multiplied by 1,000,000.
<b>Source</b>	<a href="#">UNESCO UIS</a>
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly reflects the size of the R&amp;D workforce relative to population.</li> <li>• Normalized to population, so it facilitates comparisons between countries of different sizes and economic contexts.</li> <li>• Less volatile than R&amp;D expenditure as a % of GDP, which is influenced by economic fluctuations.</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A country may have many researchers per capita but low research output or impact.</li> <li>• A large researcher population doesn't guarantee they are well-funded or supported.</li> <li>• Varying definitions of "researcher" across countries (e.g., inclusion of PhD students, teaching staff, or private-sector researchers).</li> <li>• May overlook informal research work or contributions from emerging sectors (e.g., NGOs, startups, citizen science).</li> <li>• In countries with strong academic but weak industrial R&amp;D sectors, this metric may give an inflated sense of research capacity.</li> </ul>

## Total scientific publications per country

<b>Definition</b>	Total scientific publications per country refers to the annual number of peer-reviewed scholarly outputs in a given country.
<b>Calculation</b>	The total number of scholarly publications (usually peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and reviews) produced in a given year by researchers with at least one institutional affiliation in the country, as indexed in international bibliographic databases.
<b>Source</b>	Scopus (subscription), Web of Science (subscription), Dimensions (subscription), <a href="#">SCImago</a> (free, based on Scopus data) <sup>6</sup>
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures the volume of scientific work produced by researchers in a country.</li> <li>• Data are widely available and allow for global comparisons</li> <li>• Generally correlates with the size of the scientific workforce, investment in R&amp;D, and higher education infrastructure.</li> <li>• Enables the calculation of normalized indicators (e.g. per capita, per researcher, by GDP).</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can inflate output for small countries heavily involved in international projects when using full counting.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank also captures publications in the World Development Indicators (WDI) but these only include scientific and engineering articles published in the following fields: physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, clinical medicine, biomedical research, engineering and technology, and earth and space sciences. <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0037712/World-Development-Indicators>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Databases are biased toward STEM fields and English-language journals.</li> <li>• Different databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions) index different journals and conference proceedings and will therefore produce different results.</li> </ul>
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## Combined approach

Since all three metrics represent different dimensions of a given science system (i.e., financial commitment, human capital, and research outputs), it may be interesting to combine all three into a simple or weighted composite index.

### Simple composite index

1. Normalize each indicator on a 0-1 scale across countries (min-max normalization)
2. Compute the average of the three normalized scores

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to compute and explain</li> <li>• Straightforward comparison across countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes equal weight (importance) of all indicators (could use a weighted index instead, as below)</li> <li>• Sensitive to extreme values or outliers (can be mitigated by a different normalization method such as z-scores)</li> </ul>

### Weighted composite index

1. Normalize each indicator on a 0-1 scale across countries (min-max normalization)
2. Assign different weights to each indicator based on their perceived importance (e.g., 40% funding, 30% researchers, 30% publications)
3. Compute the weighted average of the three normalized scores

## Annex 3: Dues Revision Working Group 2024–2025

- [Sawako Shirahase](#), ISC Vice-President for Finance, Compliance and Risk (Chair)
- [Jones Fairfax Agwata](#), Kenya National Academy of Sciences
- [Irasema Coronado](#), International Political Science Association (IPSA) Executive Committee
- [Ehud Keinan](#), President, International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC)
- [Ourania Kosti](#), US National Academies, Director of Board on International Scientific Organizations
- [Lai Meng Looi](#), Academy of Sciences of Malaysia, Chair of International Committee
- [Magdalena Stoeva](#), Secretary General, International Union for Physical and Engineering Sciences in Medicine (IUPESM)
- [Silvia L. Vilches](#), International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICoRSA)