

# The UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers will transform working conditions, rights and responsibilities of researchers globally

*Scientific research has suffered from a lack of global standards. This is set to change due to the 2017 UNESCO Recommendation for Science and Science policy which codifies the coals and value systems by which science operates. **Eric Jensen** outlines the rights and responsibilities of scientific researchers enshrined in the recommendation and highlights how they will help coordinate and speed up improvements in research systems globally.*

While national science and innovation public policy is often in flux, truly global science policy initiatives are rare. Such a global initiative [gained acceptance in November 2017](#) when 195 countries signed an accord at a UN conference, enshrining a long list of progressive principles for science systems globally. They re-affirmed legal commitments to guarantee scientific freedom, ensure public engagement with science, support the 'human right to science', establish equitable and sustainable workforces and pipelines and many other valuable standards and norms that are meant to guide science equally everywhere. They set out a scientists' bill of rights, and agreed on scientists' autonomy, responsibility, freedoms and minimum working conditions. These standards are now meant to apply to researchers everywhere, whether in public, private or higher education, and the expectation that science will deliver benefits to society is also prominent in the deal. The agreement includes a requirement of four-yearly checkups.

Flying largely beneath the radar until now, the [UNESCO Recommendation for Science and Scientific Researchers](#) (2017) is set to start influencing global science and innovation policy in earnest as the first round of monitoring of its implementation gets underway. If you work in research, you should read this set of principles to understand rights that have been set out on your behalf. The full 100% implementation of these principles will be a long-term work in progress in many countries, but you should understand the rights that have already been agreed.

## Developing the Indicators Framework for the Recommendation

The UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (RSSR) has ten key priority areas for its global implementation and four-yearly monitoring. UN member-states are starting to outline how they are working to enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of their research systems in these ten areas. Within the EU-funded global Responsible Research and Innovation Networking Globally ([RRING](#)) project, we are currently working in close consultation with UNESCO to propose to governments an effective indicators framework. To trial these ideas, a set of national case studies are refining the indicators in practice: we are working on this initially in the United States, India, Ireland, South Africa and Lithuania. This indicators framework includes measures that can be employed at different levels of scientific systems to evaluate progress towards full implementation of the RSSR.

The RRING project work on these indicators draws on both EU-funded Science with and for Society project work, as well as wider methodological work on measures of public engagement culture and related concepts in universities, other surveys such as those associated with Athena SWAN equality certification, existing survey instruments such as the Wellcome Global Monitor and the recently released Wellcome Trust-funded international study of research culture.



Image credit: UNESCO

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## The RRING Indicators Framework for Key Priority Areas for the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers

The ten key priority areas that have been identified as the initial focus for RSSR implementation are as follows:

1. Responsibility of science towards the United Nations' ideals of human dignity, progress, justice, peace, welfare of humankind and respect for the environment.
2. Need for science to meaningfully interact with society and vice versa.
3. Role of science in national policy and decision- making, international cooperation and development.
4. Promotion of science as a common good.
5. Inclusive and non-discriminatory work conditions and access to education and employment in science.
6. Any scientific conduct is subject to universal human rights standards.
7. Balancing the freedoms, rights and responsibilities of researchers.
8. Scientific integrity and ethical codes of conduct for science and research and their technical applications.
9. Importance of human capital for a sound and responsible science system.
10. Role of Member States in creating an enabling environment for science and research.

Across these priority areas, the RRING indicators framework outlines proposed measures that can be employed at five different levels in scientific systems. Applying indicators across these levels will enable tracking progress as the RSSR implementation cascades from national policy through to research funding systems, research performing organizations and finally to individual researchers and the general public (and changes reverberate around these different levels).

## Conclusion

The UN human rights legal framework and the RSSR are critical to present and future global science policy. Read the [UNESCO Recommendation for Science and Scientific Researchers](#) (RSSR) today and become part of the conversation about how these principles can be integrated into policy and practice across all levels of national and global research systems.

We are working in consultation with UNESCO (which is also a partner in the RRING project and hosts the treaty body for the RSSR) on this initiative because monitoring and associated programming offers potential to help coordinate globally and speed up improvements in research systems in the same way that the UN SDGs have gained ascendance as organizing principles in recent years. For the RSSR to achieve maximum impact, greater awareness of its existence and content is essential. Keep an eye out for consultations, discussion and debate surrounding the RSSR in your country between now and March 2021, when the first monitoring report is due!

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*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*

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