

Correspondence

Call to update US re-entry rules for international researchers

As organizers of an open letter (see go.nature.com/2viu3ei) to the US government, signed by more than 1,000 scientists, we are calling for an urgent update to the COVID-19 travel restrictions affecting international researchers holding US visas. These scientists cannot re-enter the United States from any of more than 30 countries, including most of Europe (see go.nature.com/3fwu2jp).

Since July, many areas affected by the US travel ban have had higher vaccination rates and lower infection rates than the United States. By contrast, some high-risk countries, such as Mexico, Russia and Turkey, are on the US government's approved list. And despite the ban, the Delta SARS-CoV-2 variant now comprises 92% of new US COVID-19 cases.

The restrictions are discriminatory: re-entry is unconditional for US citizens and for most with student visas. US government policies have prevented most international scholars from visiting their home country for almost 18 months. Their mental health and careers, as well as the output of US research institutions, have been adversely affected.

As US-based researchers, we firmly believe that the inconsistencies behind these policies undermine the scientific community and efforts to protect public health. In our view, policies should instead be based on individual travel-risk assessments.

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*On behalf of 5 correspondents; see go.nature.com/3ysugj2

What costs half a year's pay for African scholars? Open access

Open access to the scholarly literature is crucial for African academics but, without urgent action, the move from paywall to pay-to-publish wall will continue to disenfranchise researchers.

In an unpublished study, we looked at the 40 journals with the highest impact factors in our field (ecology), and found that the average article-processing charge was US\$3,150.

Three-quarters of these journals do not offer waivers for scientists from low-income nations. The waiver process is complicated and opaque, and often seems to be based on special pleading.

African governments and universities rarely, if ever, fund article-processing fees. Most African scientists cannot afford to pay these fees themselves. Average monthly salaries are, for example, \$531 in Madagascar and \$365 in Ethiopia. In Uganda, the cost of publishing two articles could cover a year's tuition and field expenses for a master's student. In Nigeria, the fees for one paper could cover the costs of three master's students.

We applaud the efforts of funders and publishers who are promoting the accessibility of research and creating a more equitable process. To grapple with the challenges Africa faces, building research capacity depends on scientists being able to publish in – as well as read – journals.

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After malaria: which parasitic disease will China eliminate next?

China was certified as malaria-free by the World Health Organization (WHO) in June. This triumph was part of a 70-year drive by the Chinese government to eliminate the country's parasitic diseases – including schistosomiasis, leishmaniasis, lymphatic filariasis and hookworm. Which are left?

Lymphatic filariasis was the first success, announced by the WHO in 2007 (Y. Fang and Y. Zhang *Infect. Dis. Poverty* 8, 66; 2019). Continuing control efforts have meant that only around 200 leishmaniasis cases have been reported annually since 2017 (M. B. Qian *et al. Infect. Dis. Poverty* 8, 86; 2019). By 2018, hookworm infections – due primarily to poor sanitation – affected less than 1% of the population (H. Zhu *et al. China CDC Wkly* 2, 34–38; 2020).

Schistosomiasis, down from 11.6 million in a population of 0.55 billion in the 1950s, is targeted for elimination within the next decade.

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Iran: drought must top new government's agenda

We urge Iran's incoming government to give priority to resolving the country's worst drought in 50 years (see go.nature.com/2wkwyqn). In our view, the government needs to consult with international as well as domestic water experts to prevent the imposition of flawed agendas. It should also revise earlier policies that have contributed to the crisis.

Outgoing president Hassan Rouhani blamed the drought on a 52% reduction in rainfall since last year. However, unregulated aquifer depletion and mismanagement of water resources by the authorities (see, for example, go.nature.com/3cce7or) have contributed.

The drought and its associated dust haze is also severely affecting ecosystems in and around Iran (see go.nature.com/3jhauvc and <http://pana.ir/news/1178597>).

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