

# 1 **Inherited challenges in the pursuit of an academic career abroad**

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8 A scientific career comes with challenges for everyone, but some face greater trials than others. As a  
9 researcher from the Global South, who pursued postgraduate studies and now works in the Global  
10 North, I have had the opportunity to explore the disparities between both worlds and to understand  
11 some of the inherited challenges faced by students and researchers in and from the Global South. Here,  
12 I discuss my own experience grappling with these roadblocks as a Middle Eastern scientist working in  
13 Europe.

14 The first major challenge that I face is the travel permitted by my Lebanese passport. My passport  
15 allows entry to around 40 countries without a prior visa, unlike more than 170 visa-free destinations  
16 for holders of most Global North passports. Like others<sup>1</sup>, I encounter increased expenses and  
17 administrative hurdles in obtaining visas, which result in restricted mobility and missed opportunities  
18 for education, networking, and knowledge exchange. I frequently cannot make in-person job  
19 interviews, which I believe puts me at a disadvantage and I often find myself as the only scientist  
20 among my colleagues in need of a visa for fieldwork and conferences. Funding bodies may not cover  
21 the visa fees, and I can never be certain if and when I will obtain the visa.

22 I am from the Middle East, and political instabilities there strongly impact my mental health and  
23 productivity. Questions like, "Was that bombing near the home of someone I know? Are they still  
24 alive? Are there any terrorist attacks happening in my region? Will the war start soon?" occupy my  
25 thoughts almost every day. I was fortunate enough to escape a region torn apart by wars for my  
26 postgraduate studies. However, despite leaving Lebanon in 2015, political instabilities in my home  
27 country still affect me, consuming a considerable amount of my time. I am frustrated at not being able  
28 to help my family and friends back home, who cannot even come to visit me for a weekend without  
29 applying for visas weeks in advance. This frustration is heightened by living in the Global North,  
30 where greater safety, security, and freedom of travel mean that people around me are often unable to  
31 relate.

32 Since 2019, Lebanon has faced one of the most severe economic crises in history. Public sector  
33 servants saw their salaries devalue by over 90% in just a couple of months, and over half of the  
34 population now lives below the poverty line. I count myself among the fortunate ones who were able  
35 to escape the crisis before it happened. However, even for those who manage to leave, demands remain.  
36 Finding a permanent job in academia is challenging enough, but researchers from the Global South  
37 face further pressures: they also need to secure a position with a salary sufficient to support their  
38 relatives back in their home countries. There are also no safety nets for us unless we find a permanent  
39 job. Going back to Lebanon in the event of a career interruption would mean starting from scratch,  
40 living with no money, and even worse, without healthcare or social security because these are not  
41 available for most Lebanese citizens.

42 These are just some of the challenges faced by researchers from the Global South, even those who  
43 have moved away from their home countries to more affluent regions<sup>2</sup>. However, this is not an  
44 exhaustive list. Researchers both at home and abroad may also face personal discrimination based on  
45 their gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. That said, I also fully acknowledge my privileges of being able  
46 to study and work in the Global North, which means that I do not directly experience the consequences  
47 of political and economic instabilities in Lebanon. All the challenges I mention heavily impact the  
48 well-being and productivity of researchers and students who remain there, who grapple with the direct

49 manifestations of these challenges, such as poor funding and maintenance of research infrastructure,  
50 increasing financial pressures, and heightened safety risks.

51 I describe myself as “lucky”. Growing up in rural Lebanon, I was not afforded many privileges, aside  
52 from being raised by loving and caring parents, and I worked hard to gain the privileges I have today.  
53 But no matter how hard I worked, none of it would have been possible if I hadn’t had the opportunity  
54 to travel and study abroad at the right time. For example, I was able to study in France because France  
55 used to welcome international students to study for free. However, this policy changed soon after I  
56 began my PhD, and international students are now required to pay thousands of euros annually to  
57 attend French public universities—there is no way I could have afforded this. Increases in tuition fees  
58 and restrictions on student travel often stem from politicians’ detachment from reality. Politicians see  
59 foreign students as a threat to their countries’ job markets, overlooking valuable perspectives and  
60 contributions foreign researchers and students bring to the scientific and economic development of the  
61 host country. I recently led the publication of a new French fossil site<sup>3</sup>: without our international  
62 collaboration, this site could have remained unknown to the global scientific community.

63 Researchers from developed countries must continue to establish international research collaborations  
64 that actively involve researchers from lower/middle income countries, and share expertise, technology,  
65 and resources, in addition to establishing mentorship programs and training opportunities for students  
66 from poorer regions<sup>4</sup>. But these types of positive actions alone are insufficient to drive diversity and  
67 inclusion in science. Advocating for policy changes at both national and international levels is a must,  
68 especially concerning travel restrictions for researchers and students. Pressuring governments to  
69 promote peace and stability in other regions of the world is also crucial. Otherwise, actions like  
70 donating infrastructure to higher education institutions in developing countries become futile, and the  
71 brain drain of researchers to the Global North will continue.

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