UN SDG Publishers Compact

Top action tips for promoting equity in research and publishing: for collaborative use by researchers, publishers, editors, funders and higher education institutions.

Equity is a matter of fairness in relation to the just distribution of resources. It does not imply absolute equality, but it does imply equality of opportunity. Since equity is an underlying principle behind the SDGs, we believe that:

All stakeholders should:

1. Acknowledge that collaboration may be more important than competition when striving to promote conditions of equity (e.g., engagement in dialogues and initiatives aimed at promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in the scholarly community, and sharing best practices and success stories to inspire and motivate others) [1].

2. Agree that counting research publications and citations only tells part of the story of the true impact of research and is not an effective measure of quality. Numbers alone are a poor proxy for assessing impact, outcomes and evaluating possible real-world benefits. New equitable assessment frameworks need to be developed and appropriately applied (e.g., relating to tenure criteria, funding decisions, institutional and/or journal rankings) [2] [3].

All publishers should:

---

[1] For practical examples of effective collaboration see Joint Commitment for Action on Inclusion and Diversity in Publishing and C4DISC

[2] DORA, Academic Incentives and Research Impact: Developing Reward and Recognition Systems to Better People's Lives

3. Ensure that they have a clearly communicated policy on discounts and waivers, which is fair, equitable and transparent (e.g., in relation to article processing charges and/or equitable access to subscription content) [4].

4. Continue to develop business practices/models that are fair, equitable and transparent, and adapt these accordingly [5].

5. Recognize that some forms of discrimination may be the result of bias. Action may be needed to avoid under-representation by authors from historically marginalized groups (ref. SDG 5 on achieving gender equality). Gender and other forms of discrimination and bias should be guarded against through policies aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion (ref. SDG 10 on reducing inequality) [6].

All journal editors should:

6. Guard against systemic bias that may be inherent in systems and processes for peer review, taking steps to mitigate and avoid this, where necessary [7] [8].

7. Take steps to ensure that editorial boards are equitable, culturally and geographically diverse in composition, [9] [10] [11] (recognizing that someone can have more than one ethnicity and could be working in a country other than where they were born, data may be incomplete, and nothing should be inferred simply from a person's name).

8. Be aware that authors may not be writing in their first language, which can affect all stages of the process, from research through to publication. This may mean taking

---

[4] See Research4life

[5] See OASPA Equity in Open Access

[6] Royal Society of Chemistry: Joint commitment for action on inclusion and diversity in publishing

[7] C4DISC Toolkits for Equity

[8] The TRUST Code: A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships

[9] For example: Taylor and Francis, Editor Resources on increasing diversity, and Emerald Publishing, Indigenous Voices

[10] Elsevier Report (2022) Making progress towards a more inclusive research ecosystem

[11] Springer Nature (2022) Addressing diversity & inclusion in peer reviewer and editorial board recruitment

additional steps to promote fairness and improve accessibility, including use of a balanced, transparent blend of human and automated processes and tools. Where Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are used, they should be checked for inbuilt bias [12] [13].

All researchers and funders should:

9. Actively consider equity throughout the process of funding, planning, researching, writing up and publishing findings. SDGs 16 and 17 (on peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals) may need to be factored into these considerations. For instance, funders could stipulate conditions relating to equity, access and dissemination of findings when making grants.

10. Avoid discrimination and underrepresentation, through striving to ensure that communities that are the focus of research (e.g., in global health) are co-creators and active participants, with their input clearly acknowledged, including access to the end results (i.e., avoiding parachute research whereby powerful institutions 'drop in and drop out' without active engagement, participation and/or acknowledgement of work done by/with local communities) [14] [15].

Please note:

These tips were developed over time in consultation with Fellows and other stakeholders and may be taken as an indication of values that inform the collective work of the HESI SDG Publishers Compact Fellows. They are designed to be succinct and accessible to help promote good practice in sustainability and trigger further discussion on how best to improve equity and promote SDGs in academic publishing and research.

We recognize that equity is hard to define and that these tips are neither exhaustive nor definitive. For instance, they do not address wide-ranging equity issues in higher education (as researched by UNESCO and others), [16] advise publishers on policies relating to open access or other issues with commercial implications, address the full range of issues relating to disability, diversity and inclusion, or consider implications of AI across the whole publishing ecosystem.

---

[12] GPT detectors are biased against non-native English writers. Cell Press: Patterns, 2023

[13] C4DISC: Guidelines on Inclusive Language and Images in Scholarly Communication

[14] Royal Society of Chemistry: The minimum standards for scholarly publishing

[15] Countering helicopter research with equitable partnerships. Lancet Global Health, July 2023

[16] UNESCO Knowledge-driven Actions: Transforming higher education for global sustainability