TERMS OF REFERENCE

SCRS Research Continuity Grants for Africa

First pilot call for applications

Aim: To preserve scientific capacities and strengthen the resilience of scientific systems in crisis-affected contexts in Africa by supporting scientists based at universities or research institutes in Africa to resume or complete natural-science research interrupted by conflict or a conflict or a natural or biological hazard.

1. Background

Crises can abruptly stop or delay research by damaging facilities, restricting access to study sites, displacing scientists, interrupting data collection and exhausting institutional resources. In Africa, these shocks occur within scientific systems that often have limited resources and few options for emergency research funding. At the end of 2024, 38.8 million people were living in internal displacement in sub-Saharan Africa,[1] while research capacity and investment remained constrained.[2][3] Small, timely grants can protect earlier investments, preserve data, research teams and institutional capacity, and help ensure that evidence remains available for recovery and sustainable development.

UNESCO's Science for Crisis Response and Solutions (SCRS) Programme supports the continuity, recovery and resilience of science before, during and after crises. The first SCRS Research Continuity Grants for Africa will be implemented as a pilot providing six small institutional grants. It is a practical contribution to Global Priority Africa and the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (2024-2033). The pilot is also intended to generate lessons for the future evolution of SCRS.

Research-continuity grants are one component of a broader SCRS vision. Over time, and subject to future decisions and resources, the programme could encompass other mechanisms supporting science in crises, including access to scientific infrastructure, international cooperation, temporary hosting and other research-continuity arrangements.

2. Objectives of the pilot call

- Preserve scientific capacities and strengthen the resilience of scientific systems in crisis-affected contexts.
- Provide rapid, modest support to resume or complete natural-science research interrupted by a recent crisis.
- Reduce the risk that data, fieldwork, laboratory work, research teams and earlier institutional investments are permanently lost during crisis
- Promote equitable access to research-continuity support, particularly to women, scientists under 40, scientists from LDCs and SIDS in Africa.
- Generate practical lessons to inform the future evolution of SCRS, its interventions and advocacy for resilient science systems.
- Form the nucleus of a future African network of scientists with direct experience of maintaining research through crises.

3. Scope and grant conditions

Item	Condition
Pilot status	First pilot call; implementation experience and lessons will inform future SCRS development.

Item	Condition
Awards	Six grants of USD 2,000 each.
Recipient of funds	The applicant's recognized university or research institute.
Eligible research	Natural sciences, including relevant interdisciplinary research with a substantial natural-science component.
Grant period	Up to six months from receipt of funds.
Use of funds	Essential research inputs required to restart or complete the interrupted work.
Reporting	A midpoint update, short final narrative report, expenditure statement, evidence of outputs and lessons learned.

4. Alignment with the Science Decade

The pilot call follows up on the first Global Conference's emphasis on science in action, inclusion, resilience, closing scientific gaps and partnership. It translates these priorities into direct support for researchers in Africa and their host institutions. It will help maintain locally led knowledge, institutional capacity and scientific communities that contribute to crisis recovery and sustainable development.

5. UNESCO's comparative advantage and learning role

UNESCO is well placed to lead the pilot through its mandate to strengthen scientific systems, foster international scientific cooperation and build long-term institutional resilience. Its relationships with Member States, national commissions, field offices, universities, research institutions and scientific networks support targeted outreach, institutional engagement and the sharing of lessons across countries. The pilot will therefore support individual research while also generating evidence relevant to host institutions, national research systems and the future development of SCRS.

6. Eligibility criteria

Applicants must meet all the following requirements:

- Be a scientist of an African nationality based at a recognized university or research institute in an African country.
- Hold at least a Master's degree, or an equivalent recognized research qualification, in a relevant field.
- Be undertaking natural-science research, or interdisciplinary research with a substantial natural-science component.
- Demonstrate that the proposed research was interrupted by an armed conflict or conflict or a natural or biological hazard within the previous three years or remain materially affected by the consequences of such a crisis.
- Submit a support letter signed by an authorized representative of the host institution confirming the applicant's affiliation, research activity and the institution's willingness to receive and administer the grant.
- Propose activities that can be completed within six months and within the USD 2,000 ceiling.
- Confirm that the same costs are not funded from another source.

7. Priority considerations

All eligible applications will be assessed on merit. Within a strong eligible pool, the review panel will seek:

- an intended final cohort of preferably three women and three men, subject to application quality and eligibility;
- where feasible, three grants addressing interruptions caused by conflict and three addressing interruptions caused by natural or biological hazard hazards;
- geographical balance across Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, while retaining eligibility for North Africa;
- strong participation by scientists under 40, scientists from LDCs and scientists from SIDS in Africa; and
- applicants with limited access to alternative research funding.

Applicants from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe are encouraged to apply. The pilot call is not restricted to this list.

8. Eligible and ineligible costs

Eligible examples	Ineligible
Consumables and small research supplies	Salary replacement, honoraria or personal allowances
Local fieldwork and research travel	International relocation or long-term subsistence
Data collection, processing or secure storage	Major equipment or construction
Minor equipment repair or essential short-term access	Institutional overhead
Laboratory, publication or open-access costs directly tied to the research	Activities unrelated to the interrupted research

9. Required application package

- Completed application form.
- Project summary and explanation of how the crisis interrupted the research.
- Workplan, expected outputs and risk-management measures.
- Itemized budget in USD, not exceeding USD 2,000.
- Curriculum vitae and evidence of the highest relevant qualification.
- Institutional support letter and institutional payment details at the award stage.
- Any ethics, research or fieldwork authorization required for the proposed activities.

10. Assessment criteria

Criterion	What the review panel will assess	Weight
Eligibility and crisis link	Clear evidence that an eligible crisis interrupted or continues to affect the research.	20%
Scientific merit and relevance	Quality of the research question, relevance to sustainable development or recovery an number of beneficiaries	25%
Feasibility	Realistic activities, timetable, institutional support and risk management.	20%
Use of funds	Clear, economical budget is directly linked to restarting or completing the research.	15%
Expected results	Specific outputs and potential benefit to the host institution, scientific community, national research system or knowledge base.	15%
Learning and network contribution	Willingness to share lessons and contribute to the future SCRS network.	5%

11. Selection process

- Administrative review by UNESCO to confirm completeness and eligibility.
- Independent scoring by review panel members using the published assessment criteria.
- Review panel meeting to agree a ranked list, reserves and the proposed cohort balance.
- Institutional verification before final approval.
- Notification of selected applicants and conclusion of the appropriate grant arrangement with host institutions.

UNESCO will retain final decision-making authority.

12. Proposed review panel and partner roles

The review panel should combine expertise in natural sciences, research management, Africa, crisis response, gender equality and support to at-risk researchers. It may include relevant UNESCO representatives and invited external experts. Potential external partners, subject to interest, availability and formal confirmation, include the Philipp Schwartz Initiative, EURAXESS Science4Refugees, Cara, the PAUSE Programme, Hestia - Refugees in Science and UNESCO Chairs and Centres.

Actor	Proposed role
UNESCO/SCRS	Manage the pilot call; conduct eligibility checks; convene the review panel; administer awards; monitor results and consolidate lessons.
Priority Africa and Crisis coordination unit	Support strategic alignment, outreach, regional balance and technical review.
Invited partners/independent experts	Score eligible applications, participate in the review panel meeting and advise on safeguards and referral options.
Host institutions	Confirm affiliation; receive and administer funds; facilitate research; preserve institutional capacity; provide financial accountability.
Selected scientists	Implement the workplan, report results and lessons, and participate in the nucleus of the future network.

All review panel members must sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations. A member must recuse themselves from any application involving their institution, close collaborator or other material conflict.

13. Timeline

Step	Proposed date
Call published	05 October 2026
Deadline for questions	14 November 2026

Step	Proposed date
Applications close	15 November 2026, 23:59 Paris time
Eligibility review	16 November-30 November 2026
Technical review and review panel meeting	16- 30 November 2026
Announcement	December
Institutional agreements and transfers	December-January 2026
Implementation	Up to six months from receipt of funds
Final report	Within 30 days of completion

14. Grant administration and safeguards

- Awards are subject to UNESCO's administrative requirements.
- The host institution will maintain supporting documents and return any unspent or ineligible balance in accordance with the agreement.
- Research involving human participants, animals, protected areas, biological materials or security-sensitive fieldwork must have the necessary institutional approvals.
- Applicants should identify safety, access, data-protection and do-no-harm risks and explain how they will be managed.

15. Monitoring, reporting and future network participation

Each recipient will submit a brief midpoint update and a final report describing activities, outputs, expenditure, remaining barriers and lessons for research continuity. Outputs may include restored datasets, completed experiments or fieldwork, draft manuscripts, technical notes, publications or other verifiable products appropriate to the discipline. UNESCO will consolidate the lessons to inform the future evolution of SCRS and possible future interventions.

The six recipients will be invited to form the nucleus of a future SCRS African Research Continuity Network. As this develops, it may advise the programme, advocate for the continuity of science in crisis settings and contribute to peer learning. After completing their grants, recipients may be invited to support future selection rounds, subject to independence, confidentiality and conflict-of-interest requirements.

16. Indicative budget

Budget line	Amount (USD)
Six research-continuity grants x USD 2,000	12,000
Staff time, outreach, review panel participation and monitoring	In kind
Total direct grant budget	12,000

17. Contact and submission

Applications will be submitted online it not possible it may be sent to the following email address: scienceresponse@unesco.org

18. Selected references

- [1] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Report on Internal Displacement 2025, p. 29: https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/idmc-grid-2025-global-report-on-internal-displacement.pdf#page=20
- [2] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, February 2025 UIS Data Release: Explore the latest progress on SDG 9.5 Research and Development through key indicators Figure 2: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/february-2025-uis-data-release-explore-latest-progress-sdg-95-research-and-development-through-key
- [3] UNESCO, African Perspectives on Scientific Freedom: Insights from Policy and Practice in 6 Countries (2024): p. 11. UNESCO publication https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391148
- UNESCO, 2026 Global Conference of the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/2026-global-conference-international-decade-sciences-sustainable-development-2024-2033
- UNESCO, World Science Day for Peace and Development: https://www.unesco.org/en/days/science-peace-development