

THIS WEEK

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Proud to support Pride in STEM

Nature strongly backs this year's International Day of LGBTQ+ People in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths, and urges the whole research community to boost equal rights.

In 2022, St Petersburg will welcome the world's largest and most prestigious event in mathematics. But among the thousands of delegates at the next International Congress of Mathematicians (ICM) will be some who might find Russia less welcoming.

Mathematicians from sexual or gender minorities (LGBT+) might think twice about going to a country where they could be arrested for advocating equal rights, and where hate crimes and discrimination against members of their communities are reported to be rising.

Last week marked the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising in New York City, which catalysed a global movement to decriminalize same-sex relationships and gain rights and recognition for people across the LGBT+ spectrum. There is a long way to go, but many countries now have laws that specifically protect some of those rights. Some research leaders, however, have been slow to champion minority groups — although that is starting to change, partly thanks to community activism.

Pride in STEM, just one of the latest grass-roots-led campaigns for a higher profile and better rights for LGBT+ scientists, now has the support of many prominent scientific organizations worldwide, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the biomedical research charity Wellcome. On 5 July, they and other campaign groups will celebrate the second International Day of LGBTQ+ People in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths, and *Nature* is proud to add its support to this important movement.

This progress, however, has also exposed the scale of the challenge. In a survey of LGBT+ physical scientists in the United Kingdom published last week by a consortium of science academies, 28% of those polled had considered leaving their workplace because of an unwelcoming climate or outright discrimination (see page 16). A 2016 survey from the United States had similar findings.

The situation is much worse elsewhere. In 70 countries, sexual acts between people of the same sex remain criminalized; in 12, they can be punished by death. Most governments still deny trans people the right to legally change their name and gender. And in countries where same-sex sexual acts are legal, as in Russia, being open about sexuality or gender expression can lead to harassment and exclusion. LGBT+ scientists in those countries struggle every day, and many risk their lives.

The solutions are neither obvious nor easy. Even for scientists in countries with inclusive laws, international travel and collaborations are career essentials. Where they bring risks, employers should minimize them, but the ultimate choices should remain with individuals. At the same time, employers should put in place measures to mitigate career penalties for researchers who decide that it is safer not to travel to a country where they could be at risk.

Establishing how to do this needs work, and this is where researchers, academies and funders can and should do more. Employers should, for example, develop best practices in collaboration with their LGBT+ staff and, if needed, with charities such as Stonewall in the United Kingdom and Campus Pride in the United States.

The situation for researchers in countries with more discriminatory

laws is harder and more complex to navigate, but here, too, individuals and institutions in countries with inclusive laws can have an important role. The consortium that published last week's survey — the United Kingdom's Institute of Physics, Royal Astronomical Society and Royal Society of Chemistry — is one group that can move things on for scientists who live and work in countries where there are fewer protections.

The group's report, *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists*, recommends that employers support international LGBT+ staff and students who have come out while in countries such as the United Kingdom, and who will return to countries where the laws are less inclusive (see go.nature.com/2xgcjaw). In addition to this, the academies could propose that their counterparts in other countries do the same, through their shared membership of the Interacademy Partnership, an international network of science academies.

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Similarly, science funders should increase support for charities such as Scholars at Risk, based in New York City, and the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) in London. These organizations provide a lifeline for researchers who are compelled to leave dangerous or potentially life-threatening situations in their countries of origin. In recent weeks, for example, CARA has been able to resettle an LGBT+ scientist whose family in her country of origin was forcing her into marriage with a man.

Organizers of conferences such as the ICM also have an opportunity to strengthen laws and conventions, and a duty to do so when they set up events in partnership with institutions in countries where laws or social conventions leave LGBT+ communities vulnerable. A petition from mathematicians outside Russia to boycott the congress, in part because of the country's discriminatory environment, is gaining signatures. A decision to host in an LGBT+ hostile country should never be taken lightly and, at a minimum, ICM organizers should take this as an opportunity to work with local hosts to adopt inclusive terms and conditions — as they would with a local organizing partner anywhere in the world — so that all delegates are welcomed.

Ultimately, however, lasting change to societal attitudes will need more than contract amendments and new laws. In science, as in life, there can be no outsiders. Moreover, evidence abounds that research, scholarship and innovation advance when there are no borders. Researchers can discover and invent when they can be themselves.

Living in fear or not being able to show their true selves harms individuals. Keeping people from doing their best science, or excluding them, harms everyone. Researchers everywhere should support the International Day of LGBTQ+ People in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths, and research organizations should continue to lobby their governments for more inclusive lawmaking. *Nature*, too, has much more to do to promote equality for all marginalized groups. Scientists should never be made to feel that hiding their sexual or gender orientation is the solution. ■