

BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARY

Trust in Science for Democratic Resilience

20 participants from across Europe, including representatives from young academies across Europe and ALLEA Member Academies.

Main Topics Discussed

The session considered the topic of trust in science and of trustworthy science; these points are interrelated while originating from different perspectives since asking for trust presupposes being trustworthy.

Key Findings

- The participants focused first on the question on how science is communicated. Scientific institutions should communicate more and on a regular basis; furthermore, instead of using classical communication departments they should also employ science communicators. The participants argued that if scientists were able to better explain (with more empathy) what they do, they and their work would gain more acceptance. This type of communication should be understood as a dialogue, and the goal of such dialogue is to build relationships between scientists and the public rather than to simply convey information. The participants noted, too, that scientists expose themselves to attacks in the process of dialoguing, which lowers scientists' readiness to engage with and in public.
- The target group of this dialogue should be able to understand the information provided by scientific institutions. For this reason, participants emphasised the importance of education and scientific literacy. Education prepares citizens to understand and process complex information, thus helping to lay the groundwork for dialogue.
- In today's information ecosystem, however, citizens are faced with substantial and uninterrupted flows of information, which may be also untrue and misleading. The problem of mis- and disinformation was thus discussed, and the participants stressed that this is an understudied field.
- Finally, the participants noted that in certain circumstances, science can be used by state actors to suit their political goals. In such cases, it is important for scientists to speak directly to the public to make sure that their work is not misused for political objectives.

Outcomes and Follow-up actions

- Communication should be adapted to the audience and dis- and misinformation tackled and fought. Also, scientists should be supported structurally by their institutions when attacked, especially on an ad-personam level.
- Academies can help by putting pressure to influence policies on academic freedom and can help change the culture around the need for supporting scholars who decide to engage and speak out.
- On a practical level, reforms in the evaluation system should be promoted and supported. For example, science communication should gain recognition and visibility.
- Education is key, the participants stressed that scientific education should start very early on.

The general plea was for measures that would humanise scientists, with concrete actions, and that scientists be the reference point within debates that are fact-based and that scientific advice is instrumentalised by politics.