



**WFSJ**

World Federation of Science Journalists

# Annual Report 2021





## **WFSJ Web site**

In February 2021, the WFSJ launched its new Web site, developed by the Ottawa-based firm EnvisionUp and managed by Webmaster Krista Leroux. The site, which runs the latest version of the definitive Web software WordPress, featured a dramatically different set of graphics, as well as menus that opened more quickly and reliably.

The task of building a Web site can be both satisfying and frustrating. It is almost impossible to arrive at a design that pleases everyone and very easy to come up with something serviceable that pleases no one. For reference, we took a tour of our member association Web sites, which cover a broad range of content and format. Some are purely functional, while others are downright baroque in style, with everything in between. At this point in the history of information technology, we now understand Web sites to represent an individual's or an organization's character, which is exactly what each of these sites does.

As part of creating the new WFSJ site, therefore, it was important to retain a familiar structure that we hoped members would continue to find satisfying, while also add new elements that would capture their imagination and showcase an organization that is continuing to evolve. And indeed, the new site is capable of supporting features that are still being planned, such as a members-only password-restricted section and a possible discussion forum. In fact, the full extent of the new site's capabilities has yet to be defined!



## Louise Behan Reporting Grants

In June 2021, the WFSJ announced the winners of the first round of grants given to science writers in low and middle-income countries to support their work on promising stories in different fields. This initiative is the latest outgrowth of the WFSJ's longstanding activities to train journalists around the world. Applicants submitted descriptions of themselves, their work, and a project they would undertake using the US\$750 award. These applications were reviewed by a panel of judges: Colombian science journalist Nicolas Bustamante-Hernandez, Kenyan science journalist Rosalia Omungo, and Australian science journalist Melody Kemp.

The first round of winners was made up of these three entries:

- Malawi science writer Leonard Masauli, who wrote about the effect of turtle poaching on human health
- Brazilian science writer Sofia Moutinho, who wrote about an invasive species of mussel that is threatening the ecological balance of the Amazon River basin
- Kenyan science writer Wandera Ojanji, who wrote about the impact of brick making on that country's environment

These reporting grants were made possible with the kind support of **Louise Behan** and Canada's [International Development Research Centre](#). Louise, who died in 2019, left a bequest specifically for this grant program. She graduated from Ottawa's Carleton University School of Journalism in 1978, and subsequently worked for the IDRC for 13 years. The IDRC has a long history of supporting science journalism in the developing world and has been a key donor to WFSJ projects, such as [SjCOOP](#) and the 4<sup>th</sup> [WCSJ](#) in Montreal in 2004.



## **UN Consultative Status**

In July 2021, the World Federation of Science Journalists was granted consultative status with the United Nations. This special recognition allows non-governmental organizations to work through the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to gain enhanced access to all aspects of this massive international body and its work.

The UN regards this approach as a useful way of enlisting the expertise or informed advice of NGOs to apply their longstanding experience in particular regions and fields. For those same NGOs, consultative status provides an exceptional opportunity to express their views and influence ECOSOC activities.

In practice, this means representatives of the WFSJ will be able to attend UN-organized conferences and events, where they can offer written or oral statements and even organize side events.

In this way, the WFSJ becomes well placed to promote mutual understanding between cultures through dialogue, including a broad spectrum of ethical, social, environmental, diversity, economic, and health issues that our members regularly encounter in their work. Above all, the role of science journalism in society can now be highlighted for an even wider audience.



## WHO-WFSJ Webinars for Science Journalists

Born in mid-2020 as a way of helping science writers interact directly with authoritative members of the World Health Organization to learn more about Covid-19, this platform expanded significantly over the months that followed.

By 2021 these Webinars were dealing with topics as varied as the role of equity in public health policy and how artificial intelligence will shape the future of health care. Moderated by WFSJ members, these sessions directly addressed the ongoing problem of misinformation in health reporting by enabling reporters to put questions to WHO scientists, policymakers and experts and enable them to clarify some complex subjects.

The most recent of these webinars, held at the end of October, dealt with the implication of a major WHO committee [report](#) on the implications of human genome editing.

Recordings of this and other webinar proceedings are available to WFSJ members; for more information contact [office@wfsj.org](mailto:office@wfsj.org)



THE  
ABEL  
PRIZE

## Abel Prize Webinar

In March 2021 the WFSJ hosted an exclusive interview with 2021 Abel Prize Laureates László Lovász and Avi Wigderson. Moderated by technology journalist Andrada Fiscutean, this event showcased work in computer science, number theory, cryptography, and mobile computing, as well as offering engaging insights into the personal character of two of the world's most outstanding mathematicians.

The Abel Prize, which is administered by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and features a monetary award worth around US\$1 million, honours the pioneering contributions of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century mathematician Niels Henrik Abel.



# Letten Prize

## Letten Prize Webinar

In June 2021 the WFSJ hosted a series of exclusive interviews with the winner and runners-up of this year's Letten Prize. Norway's [Letten Foundation](#) and the [Young Academy of Norway](#) offer this award in recognition of contributions made by young researchers in health, development, environment, and human equality.

Created in 2018, this award provides the equivalent of US\$240,000 to an honoree under the age of 45 whose work on global challenges is expected to have a tangible effect on society and people's lives.

Prize winner Meta Roestenberg, who studies tropical medicine at Leiden University Medical Centre in The Netherlands, described her work on new vaccines to treat diseases of poverty that are often overlooked by medical researchers. Runners-up Tolu Oni and Ramona Vijayarasa discussed their own work, which covers aspects of urban development in Africa and new approaches to gender-responsive law, respectively.

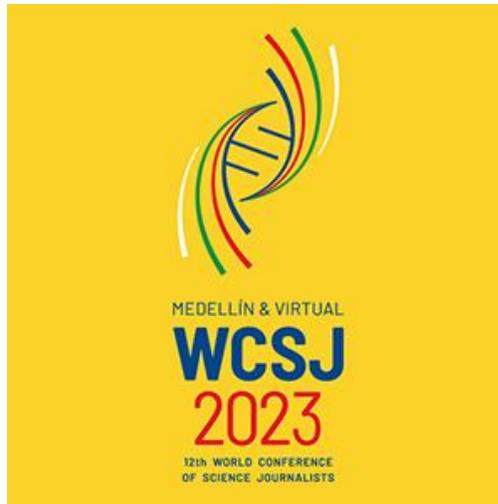


## Global Science Journalism Report 2021

The WFSJ was part of an international initiative to take the pulse of science writers around the world at a difficult time for this profession. A survey of some 633 individuals revealed who is engaged in this line of work and how they feel about its prospects. A majority of the respondents were optimistic about the future of the field, which many regard as healthy if not thriving.

Other insights shed light on the working conditions associated with science journalism, which can vary widely. Although this [detailed portrait](#) was published on SciDev.Net, the findings also led to an academic paper for the [Journal of Science Communication](#).

Collaborators in this survey included the Brazilian Institute of Public Communication of Science and Technology/House of Oswaldo Cruz, the London School of Economics, the ISCTE-Lisbon University, the Australian National Centre of Public Awareness of Science, the Center for Ethics in Science and Journalism, and SciComm X.

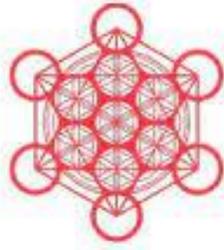


## Moving forward with WCSJ

Among the most frustrating consequences of the pandemic has been the barriers it presented to the WFSJ's planning for the World Conference of Science Journalists in Medellín, Colombia. The pandemic's ongoing impact led to changing the event's date twice and prevented planners from investigating the venues that would be associated with it. In spite of the difficulties posed by any kind of international travel, the WFSJ was able to send a team to Colombia in November, where a great deal of progress was made in short order.

The [most exciting development](#) was the identification of Medellín's dramatic botanical gardens as the primary conference site. Conference committee members regard this enticing setting as representative of the destinations that will characterize professional meetings in a post-pandemic world where the prospect of travel is no longer taken for granted.

Learn more about this fantastic experience at the [official website of the World Conference of Science Journalists](#).



THE  
KAVLI  
FOUNDATION

## **Kavli Science Journalism Ethics Workshop**

In December 2019, The Kavli Foundation and the WFSJ signed a Grant Agreement based on an initial Proposal submitted by the WFSJ, titled “Establishing the boundaries of Ethics in Science Journalism”. This project was to have included a number of workshops in different locations, where active science writers could discuss the guiding principles that inform their professional practice.

The Covid pandemic prevented any such gatherings until November 2021, when the WFSJ organized a three-day event in San Jerónimo (Antioquia, Colombia). The resulting discussion and report served as the basis for a regional survey of science journalists in Latin American countries, which was subsequently be expanded to a global scale.

The findings from this extensive survey will provide the basis for a major workshop in 2022 to draft a definitive statement of guiding principles for science journalists, which will serve as a cornerstone document for the WFSJ.

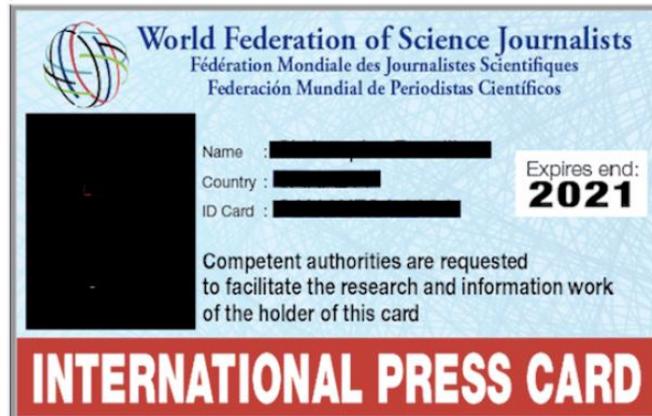


## Spark Grant Initiative

As a tribute to the spirit and success of the past two World Conferences of Science Journalism, the five organizations responsible for these events launched a program inviting other Member Associations to take part in a similar strengthening of the science journalism community.

The [Spark Grant Initiative](#) (SGI) offered grants of up to US\$20,000 for proposals that would be far broader in scope and impact than any individual efforts in science reporting. Dozens of these proposals were put forward, which made for interesting reading and discussion by the SGI committee.

The resulting activities should become part of the list of accomplishments we will be celebrating a year from now. Watch for the announcement of the inaugural round of SGI projects in mid-January.



## Press Card Directory

In the fall of 2021, the WFSJ began to explore the value that its popular Press Card program could bring to the membership. With the redesign of the Federation's Web site, it was now possible to assemble the information collected through this program and store it securely in a way that respected every individual's privacy. An ambitious project therefore began to create a definitive international directory of science journalists, which would be available to those who had already been approved to receive these documents, which confirmed their status as established, working science writers.

WFSJ staff worked closely with the Web site developer to add a password protected area for this directory, which would include interactive features such as a search engine or the option for individuals to add new information to their listing, such as a short biographical note or link to their own Web site. This directory will also make it possible for the WFSJ to provide additional services to these members, who could be specifically included in future agreements with publishers or research organizations to provide information or job listings exclusively for this professional audience.

Ultimately, this directory will set the stage for an even more challenging goal, that of creating a moderated discussion group. Although this feature may take longer to complete, the Web designers have laid the software foundation for such an interactive forum, which would allow science journalists to exchange ideas about their field with their peers around the world. Watch for the launch of the Press Card directory in 2022, and the beginning of one of the most exciting developments in the WFSJ's history.