Strengthening Public Trust in Science

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CONFERENCE

Analysing the challenges and identifying solutions

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TRUST IN SCIENCE
CONFERENCE

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Introduction

The pursuit of scientific knowledge plays an essential role in driving societal progress and tackling contemporary challenges, such as health crises or climate change. Trust in the scientific process is crucial for the development of evidence-based public policy and informed, democratic decision making.

On 11 December 2025, the French National Research Agency (ANR) and Science Europe organised a conference on Trust in Science at the *Bibiothéque Nationale de France* in Paris, as part of ANR's 20th anniversary celebrations. The conference aimed to explore key levers for action and practical solutions to promote open, transparent, and trustworthy science. It set out to:

- **identify** the factors that undermine public confidence in science, scientists and research institutions.
- **examine** the dynamics between science, society and the media in the dissemination of knowledge, scientific debates and public engagement.
- **share** best practices in science communication and public engagement.

This report presents a synthesis of the keynote speeches and panel discussions, attended by over 440 participants, both in person and online, from research funding and performing organisations, policy makers at European and national level, academia, industry, the media, and civil society organisations.

Executive Summary

The Trust in Science Conference, organised by the French National Research Agency (ANR) and Science Europe, emphasised that trust in science is essential for society, policy making, and research systems, yet is becoming increasingly fragile. Technological change, health crises (such as Covid-19), political polarisation, and global information flows have reshaped how the public perceives science.

Discussions throughout the conference highlighted the complexity of how trust in science is built and maintained. Participants emphasised that trust should not be equated with blind acceptance of scientific findings, but that it requires confidence in transparent scientific processes and the continuous testing and refinement of knowledge. While science plays a crucial role in supporting social cohesion and democratic progress, maintaining trust requires the active engagement of a wide range of actors, including researchers, institutions, policy makers, the media, and citizens. Scientific integrity, transparent communication, and education were consistently identified as essential foundations.

Evidence presented during the conference suggested that public trust in science across Europe remains broadly strong, although it varies across contexts and topics. Trust in science operates within a complex ecosystem that includes researchers, research organisations, policy makers, journalists, and the wider public. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly vulnerable to pressures such as misinformation, polarised public debate, and competing narratives about scientific knowledge. In this environment, credible and visible actors who act as "stewards of trust" play an important role in maintaining confidence in science. Participants emphasised the importance of transparent and contextualised communication, as well as sustained investment in engagement initiatives that enable meaningful interaction between science and society.

The conference also examined how emerging technologies and controversial policy debates can place additional pressure on trust. Artificial intelligence and other disruptive technologies introduce new challenges, particularly when public perceptions are shaped by emotionally charged narratives rather than an understanding of scientific evidence. At the same time, many citizens have limited visibility into how scientific processes operate, including peer review, replication, and the accumulation of evidence over time. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen education on scientific methods and evidence assessment, while ensuring that the governance of emerging technologies reflects human rights, democratic values, and strong standards of research integrity and transparency. As knowledge production increasingly involves collaboration between universities, industry, and other actors, maintaining clear standards and responsibilities across the research ecosystem becomes even more important.

A central theme of the conference was the importance of public engagement in strengthening trust in science. Trust is not only a scientific issue but also a democratic and societal challenge, rooted in the relationships between science, society, and policy. Effective engagement requires moving beyond one-way communication towards more participatory approaches that allow citizens to contribute to research agendas and discussions about emerging technologies. Initiatives such as citizen science, participatory panels, and co-creation processes can play an important

role in strengthening societal legitimacy and mutual understanding. Participants also stressed the importance of making scientific consensus more visible while maintaining high standards of integrity and respect in interactions between scientists, communicators, and the public.

Finally, the conference highlighted the responsibility of institutions and policy makers in creating the conditions that enable trust to flourish. Trust cannot be assumed; it requires sustained effort and supportive institutional frameworks. Researchers need training, protection, and resources to engage with society safely and effectively. Participants noted that engagement strategies are most effective when they are embedded early in research policies, funding programmes, and institutional strategies, and tailored appropriately to their intended audiences. Recognising diverse forms of knowledge, including contributions from citizens, local communities, and practitioners, can also strengthen the relevance and legitimacy of research.

The discussions underscored that maintaining trust in science requires co-ordinated action across the research ecosystem, with responsibility resting on researchers, institutions, funders, policy makers, and the media. Transparent and ethical practices, meaningful public participation, strong education systems, and sustained international co-operation will be essential to ensuring that science continues to serve society and support informed, democratic decision making.

Recommendations for Strengthening Trust in Science

In a rapidly evolving informational and political landscape, strengthening trust in science requires sustained, co-ordinated action across the research ecosystem. The following recommendations, based on the discussions, aim to provide a coherent framework for action.

- **Reinforce integrity and transparency across the research ecosystem**
  Establish and uphold clear, consistent, and rigorous standards for scientific integrity across all stages of the research process. This includes responsible conduct, robust conflict-of-interest management, transparent validation of results, sound publishing practices, accountable funding procedures, and responsible use of emerging technologies. Visible commitment to ethical standards, openness, and accountability, are essential to maintaining public confidence in science.

- **Promote scientific literacy and understanding of the research process**
  Invest in education and communication initiatives that improve understanding of the scientific process – including methods, peer review, uncertainty, and the evolving nature of knowledge. A stronger grasp of how scientific operates enables citizens to better assess evidence, engage critically with information, and resist misinformation.

- **Embed trust-building into research policy, governance and funding frameworks**
  Integrate public engagement, participation, and communication as core components of research and innovation systems. This includes embedding these dimensions in funding programmes, institutional strategies, and evaluation criteria at national and international levels. Trust in science should not be treated as a by-product, but as a strategic objective of research policy.

- **Support and protect researchers in the public sphere**
  Provide researchers with the training, guidance, institutional recognition, and legal safeguards necessary to engage effectively and safely in public debate. Public engagement activities should be valued in career progression and research organisations should actively support researchers in navigating complex information environments, including topics such as misinformation and public scrutiny.

- **Foster collaboration and co-production in a complex information environment**
  Promote co-ordinated action among research institutions, funding organisations, policy makers, media, civil society, and citizens. Collaborative approaches are essential to addressing misinformation, strengthening credibility, and developing shared, socially robust solutions to complex challenges.

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities in science communication**
  Ensure clearly distinctions between scientific expertise, journalism, institutional communication, and political decision making. Promote transparent, contextualised reporting of scientific findings, including uncertainties and limitations, while fully respecting media independence.

- **Safeguard the independence of science in public policy making**
  Protect academic freedom and ensure scientific evidence is used in public decision making in a transparent, accountable, and responsible manner. Strengthen institutional mechanisms that enable science to inform policy while preserving researchers' independence and integrity.

- **Strengthen democratic participation and citizen engagement**
  Engage citizens from the earliest stages of defining research priorities, shaping funding programmes, and developing regulatory frameworks. Inclusive and participatory approaches enable meaningful dialogue between science and society, enhance democratic legitimacy, strengthen long-term trust, and foster more transparent and accountable decision making.

Next Steps

The discussions and recommendations emerging from the conference will inform ongoing work by Science Europe and its Member Organisations to strengthen trust in science across the research ecosystem. In particular, the insights gathered will contribute to the development of Guidance on Science Communication, which will support research funding and performing organisations in advancing transparent, responsible, and effective communication and engagement practices.

Participants also emphasised the importance of continuing dialogue and exchanging good practices across institutions, countries, and disciplines. Building on the momentum of the conference, collaboration between research funding and performing organisations, policy makers, media actors, and wider civil society will remain important for addressing shared challenges such as misinformation, emerging technologies, and evolving public expectations of science.

These continued exchanges will support the development of practical approaches that strengthen communication, engagement, and co-operation across the research ecosystem.

Welcome and Introduction

High-level representatives from the French National Research Agency (ANR), Science Europe, and UNESCO opened the conference. Their welcome addresses set the scene for the discussions and underlined the importance of strengthening trust in science through dialogue and engagement. They highlighted the importance of transparency, dialogue, and engagement with society, and situated the conference within broader national, European, and global efforts to support trustworthy, inclusive, and resilient research systems.

Welcome by the Hosts

Claire Giry, Chairman and CEO of the French National Research Agency (ANR), emphasised that trust in science is essential for societies and research systems, but that it is more fragile than ever. She outlined the central purpose of the conference: to explore the key factors that can undermine trust in science, examine the evolving relationship between science, society, and the media, and share best practices in science communication, transparency, and public engagement.

She hoped that the event taking place at France's national library, a space for learning and collaboration, would inspire participants to work together towards a shared outcome. Trust in science cannot be built in isolation, but must be developed and sustained through ongoing dialogue. The objective of the discussions was to contribute to the development of a roadmap for action, setting out key recommendations and shaping future work.

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Javier Moreno Fuentes, Vice-President for International Affairs at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and Vice-President of Science Europe, stated that trust is a fundamental, yet often underestimated element of well-functioning societies. It enables co-operation, reduces transaction costs in everyday interactions, and supports social cohesion and stability, allowing complex societies to function effectively. It is often only noticed when it erodes, yet it acts as a binding force between individuals, institutions, and the state.

He described science as a central component of this trust framework, having long been viewed as a reliable source of knowledge to guide societal development and inform responses to major challenges. For many decades, there was a widespread belief that scientific knowledge would underpin rational decision making and help tackle global challenges. However, over the past 20–30 years, confidence in science has weakened, influenced by technological accidents, environmental degradation, and the unintended consequences of scientific and technological progress, including in areas such as nuclear energy, pollution, and climate change.

Despite these challenges, he stressed that science remains indispensable and, ultimately, the only viable means of addressing the pressing challenges facing humanity. Scientific knowledge continues to be essential for understanding complex problems and developing effective, evidence-based solutions that benefit society as a whole.

He highlighted as a further concern, the emergence of increasingly organised political and economic interests seeking to undermine trust in science, often by promoting narratives that are not empirically grounded or by attempting to separate technological development from its scientific foundations for strategic or economic gain. In this context, he urged the scientific community to act with greater humility, rigour, and commitment, and to strengthen engagement with policy makers and society.

In closing, he underlined the roles of Science Europe and the Spanish National Research Council in supporting this engagement through sustained efforts to support researchers, inform policy, and communicate the value and relevance of science to the wider public. Trust in science is a precondition for continued public and political support, including research funding, and without such trust, the capacity of science to contribute to societal progress would be fundamentally undermined.

Welcome from UNESCO

Trust is one of the enabling conditions for science to function effectively, said **Ezra Clark**, Chief of the Science Technology and Innovation Policy Section at UNESCO. Despite the central role of science in guiding societal responses to major challenges such as climate change, health crises, and biodiversity loss, he noted growing uncertainty about evidence and expertise in an environment shaped by misinformation and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic illustrated how quickly trust in science can erode, prompting reflection on what is meant by 'trust' and how it is built. He argued that what we truly seek is not a kind of blind confidence, but engagement based on informed understanding and healthy questioning.

He emphasised that scientific uncertainty is not a weakness but a core source of science's credibility. It is precisely what makes science trustworthy, because it shows that the evidence is continuously tested and refined. Upholding scientific integrity is essential: closed systems, inequality, and perceptions of scientific elites undermine public confidence. Clark underlined the need to move beyond communication alone and to build more equitable, human-centred science systems that deliver tangible benefits to people's lives, linking trust in science to the

right of everyone to participate in and benefit from scientific progress. Structural inequalities in global research systems, including unequal participation across countries, limited investment in science in many developing countries, digital divides, and persistent gender imbalances, shape whose knowledge is recognised and valued.

Building trust is linked to openness, inclusiveness, and participation, including open science practices, multilingual access to knowledge, meaningful engagement with diverse communities, and research questions that reflect the priorities in every region – not only those of well-resourced countries or systems. He highlighted the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (2024–2033) and other UNESCO initiatives as an opportunity to build science systems that are more responsive to societal needs, more open, more equitable, and fundamentally more human-centred.

Ultimately, what is sought is not only trust in science, but trustworthy science that is open about uncertainty, honest about its limitations, and that is attentive to the social context in which knowledge is produced and used. He also noted the growing role of private-sector actors in some frontier areas of research, raising further questions about transparency and accountability. UNESCO stands ready to continue to work with all partners across all regions, to advance this shared commitment to trustworthy, inclusive, and people-centred science.

Keynote Speech

Kei Koizumi, Former Principal Deputy Director for Science, Society, and Policy at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), provided a keynote in which he reaffirmed his commitment to the transatlantic relationship between Europe and the United States, grounded in shared democratic values. He explored how recent crises and technological change are reshaping public trust in science in the United States, with lessons extending beyond national contexts.

Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic initially strengthened trust in science within parts of society, as rapid scientific advances delivered vaccines and public-health strategies that saved millions of lives. However, this effect was uneven. Trust weakened in other areas, particularly where scientific evidence became closely entangled with policy decisions. The development and roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccine proved to be particularly contentious, contributing to renewed scepticism toward vaccine science more broadly and the re-emergence of previously discredited claims.

Public Trust, Polarisation, and the Science–Policy Interface

Overall trust in science and scientists in the United States remains relatively high, with science among the most trusted institutions in abstract terms. Nonetheless, trust has declined among certain groups, notably with a divide along political and educational lines. Koizumi stressed the importance of distinguishing between science and policy: science informs decision making but does not determine policy outcomes, which are shaped by values and political choices.

When science is misrepresented to justify value-based policy positions, public trust is eroded. The blurring of science and policy risks leading the public to mistrust scientific evidence itself, rather than the decisions built upon it. To illustrate this point, he highlighted how public trust was further undermined when the lack of scientific evidence linking vaccines and autism was misrepresented in public discourse, particularly when used to justify restrictive vaccine-related policies. He described such practices as incompatible with the principles of scientific integrity and damaging to public confidence in science.

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Artificial Intelligence and Information Integrity

The implications of artificial intelligence for trust in science are still emerging, but early concerns include reduced critical engagement with information sources and the large-scale distortion of information. Koizumi identified public trust in AI-mediated information as a major challenge. He expressed his fears that the weakening of research on information integrity or the undermining of regulatory approaches, as practised by the current US administration, will further contribute to declining trust.

Education and Understanding Science

Koizumi highlighted a structural challenge to building trust in science, based on how it is taught in schools. In the US, science is presented primarily as a series of established facts, rather than as a process of inquiry and revision. This limits public understanding of scientific uncertainty, when the public see facts being contested or continually revised as hypotheses are tested, discarded, or revised – as occurred during Covid-19. Strengthening education around the nature of science and the scientific process is a key long-term priority.

Policy Pillars for Strengthening Trust in Science

Koizumi provided three priorities for strengthening trust in science from a policy perspective:

- Scientific and research integrity, including transparency, freedom for government scientists to communicate, and effective management of conflicts of interest. The public must be able to trust governments' use and promotion of science.

- Public participation in science. Trust is strengthened when science is understood as a shared endeavour. The public should be able to participate meaningfully in science, whether through participatory technology assessment, citizen science, or structured dialogue on research priorities and technology deployment. Science communication should move beyond one-way dissemination, towards genuine engagement.

- Sustained public investment in research, particularly evidence-based strategies on encouraging public trust, information integrity, and citizen- or community-based research approaches to public participation and engagement.

He concluded with the observation that trust in science cannot be built by policy makers or researchers alone. It requires collective effort, grounded in integrity, meaningful public participation, effective education, and sustained investment. Targeted policy action in these areas will be essential to maintaining science's role as a trusted foundation for democratic decision making.

SESSION 1

Europe, Science and Society – Understanding the Trust Relationship and Factors Supporting Public Trust in Science

Speakers

- **Martin Bauer**, Professor of Social Psychology and Research Methodology, London School of Economics
- **Ana Godinho**, Head of Communications & Engagement, European Spallation Source, Sweden
- **Agata Gurzawska**, Cluster Lead - Ethics, Human Rights and New Technologies, Trilateral Research
- **Kei Koizumi**, Former Principal Deputy Director for Science, Society, and Policy at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)

Moderator

- **Michel Dubois**, Senior Research Fellow, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS); Director, GEMASS

Key points

- Public trust in science in Europe remains broadly strong, but it is uneven, contextual, and cannot be assumed across all issues or groups.
- There is little evidence of a general "crisis of trust"; instead, trust fluctuates over time and is often shaped by political, social, and media dynamics.
- Trust is increasingly distributed across a complex science–society ecosystem, involving many actors beyond research institutions alone.
- Trust does not equal blind acceptance: people can value science while still expecting dialogue, participation, and accountability.
- Sustaining trust requires collective stewardship, combining research integrity, openness, engagement, communication, and supportive policy frameworks.
- Trust must be actively maintained, particularly in a global information environment shaped by misinformation, social media, and changing research cultures.

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Presentations

The opening session of the conference explored public trust in science in Europe, examining how trust is understood, how it is changing, and what this means for research systems and research funding and performing organisations. Drawing on European and international research as well as practitioner experience, the discussion addressed whether science is facing a 'crisis of trust' or whether the challenge lies in more nuanced shifts in the nature and distribution of trust.

Opening the session, **Michel Dubois** positioned trust in science as a central issue at the interface between science and society, and invited speakers to reflect on several core questions: what

does the evidence tell us about public perceptions of science today? Are populations in Europe and the US turning away from science, or is this concern overstated? And what kinds of trust should research systems aim to foster?

Presenting findings from the EU-funded VERITY project, **Agata Gurzawska** argued that, despite prominent public debates around Covid-19 vaccination and climate change, European and global data continue to show relatively high levels of societal trust in science. However, she stressed that general trust does not automatically translate into acceptance of science-based recommendations on specific issues. Trust, she noted, is contextual and conditional, shaped by people's experiences, values, and social environments.

She highlighted a paradigm shift from institutional trust to distributed trust, reflecting changes in how research is conducted and governed. In this emerging landscape, trust is no longer shaped primarily by universities and public research organisations alone, but by a wider range of actors. She described an 'ecosystem of trust in science', in which trust is formed, negotiated, and influenced across interactions involving research organisations, funders, industry, policy makers, media and social media actors, civil society, and citizens. The politicisation and privatisation of science, while opening new avenues for collaboration and investment, also brings challenges for public trust, accountability, and scientific integrity.

Within this ecosystem, the findings of the VERITY project have identified 'stewards of trust' — actors who function as gatekeepers of trust due to their mandate, influence, or visibility. Drawing on three years of research and engagement with over 500 stakeholders, she outlined six interconnected strategies for fostering trust: building trustworthy science; public engagement; education and awareness; science communication; supportive policy frameworks; and, collaboration. She emphasised that no single actor can foster trust alone, and that co-ordinated action across the ecosystem is essential.

Figure 1 *VERITY Ecosystem of Trust in Science, illustrating six overarching strategies for fostering trust in science and roles of Stewards of Trust.*

Offering a contrasting perspective, **Martin Bauer** questioned the widespread assumption that science is experiencing a crisis of public trust. Drawing on long-term survey data, including the Eurobarometer analysis from the EU-funded POIESIS project, he argued that there is variability (see Figure 2), but little evidence of a generalised decline in trust. There may in fact be too much unwarranted trust in science, he stated. There is, however, evidence for a strong public and political discourse, and a certain alarmism about a crisis of trust, which itself requires critical examination.

Figure 2 *The Four Cultures of Trust in Europe.*

Bauer cautioned against returning to older narratives of growing 'anti-science' sentiment and proposed that the challenge may lie not in a lack of trust, but in the nature of trust itself. He introduced a distinction between technocracy tolerance – the willingness to defer decision making to scientific authority (one might worry about too much of that kind of trust) – and goodwill towards science, which reflects positive attitudes to science alongside a desire for participation and democratic engagement. These orientations, he argued, have different implications for science–society relations and policy making.

He highlighted variations in trust across age groups and political positions in Europe, noting greater scepticism and less trust at the extreme ends of the political spectrum. Comparing Europe and the United States, he pointed to a distinctive long-term polarisation in US confidence in science aligned with political party affiliation. He argued this is not currently evident in Europe, and questioned if it ever will, because of more complex party structures.

Bauer also reflected on how trust can swing temporarily in response to crises. He cited examples such as the 2009 'Climategate' episode, during which trust in climate scientists dropped and swiftly recovered, or the evolution of trust during the Covid-19 pandemic, where an initial surge in trust in science and expert guidance was followed by a strong decline, before gradually returning towards the longer-term upward trend.

Drawing on his extensive experience in US science policy, **Kei Koizumi** reflected on similarities and differences between European and US trust landscapes. He cautioned against viewing developments in the United States as an isolated or uniquely American phenomenon, noting that science operates within a global information ecosystem in which misinformation, polarisation, and erosion of trust can easily cross national borders.

At the same time, he emphasised that differences between Europe and the US are often differences of degree rather than of kind, shaped by distinct political and policy environments. He underlined that trust in science cannot be sustained through government action alone, and that responsibility is distributed across many actors. Using concrete examples, he highlighted the roles different parts of society could play: journals and research institutions in upholding research integrity, community organisations in enabling public participation, and professional associations in setting norms and standards.

Koizumi also stressed that discussions about trust should not begin from an assumption of crisis, but from a recognition that trust must be actively maintained and nurtured, even when overall levels remain relatively high. He argued that sustaining trust requires engagement across sectors and society, and that all actors — including funders, publishers, researchers, and civil society organisations — have a role to play in reinforcing integrity, openness, and participation. Whatever the current state of trust, he concluded, ongoing dialogue is essential because trust cannot be taken for granted.

From a practitioner perspective, **Ana Godinho** emphasised the importance of bridging research and practice in science communication. She noted that practitioners often encounter assumptions that 'the public does not trust science', whereas empirical studies frequently present a more nuanced picture. Awareness of this evidence, she argued, is essential for designing effective communication strategies, while remaining attentive to specific groups or contexts where trust may be weaker.

Godinho identified several practical factors that contribute to trust. These included openness and transparency, particularly in challenging situations, framed not only as reputational concerns but as fundamental to trust. She also stressed the importance of authenticity, encouraging organisations and scientists to communicate honestly about what they do, including limits and uncertainties.

Drawing on her experience at CERN, she illustrated how direct public engagement, such as open days and access to facilities, can demystify complex research environments and address concerns about safety, funding, and public value. She emphasised the central role of researchers themselves in these activities, while underlining the need for appropriate training, resources, recognition, and institutional support. Respectful, two-way communication and the challenge of inclusive engagement beyond "the usual audiences" were also highlighted as key issues.

During the discussion, speakers returned to the challenge of scale. Participatory and community-based engagement can be effective, but is inherently time- and resource-intensive, while disinformation operates in a global information environment. The panellists acknowledged the lack of simple solutions, but suggested that one pragmatic approach lies in investing in the replication and scaling of proven engagement models, supported by sustained funding and capacity building.

Agata Gurzawska urged everyone to become 'stewards of trust'. People often wear multiple hats – not only as institutional representatives, but also as citizens who participate in and benefit from scientific processes. Research funding organisations were also highlighted as important stewards within the trust ecosystem and can contribute by supporting research integrity, enabling meaningful engagement or investing in communication capacity. However, they are not alone in this task: they are encouraged to work collaboratively with research producers, implementers, and science communicators, drawing on complementary expertise across the trust ecosystem.

Audience discussion

The audience discussion expanded the session by highlighting emerging challenges and practical considerations in fostering trust in science, particularly in relation to social media, research culture, misinformation, and regional diversity.

The first question focused on the growing role of social media influencers in shaping public perceptions of science, noting that they often reach far larger audiences than research organisations do. In response, Koizumi emphasised that institutions must recognise influencers as key intermediaries in today's information environment and engage with them pragmatically, while ensuring access to reliable scientific information and an understanding of the scientific method. Gurzawska added that while influencers can act as powerful stewards of trust, research also shows public ambivalence towards social media-based science communication, particularly due to concerns about hidden agendas and monetisation. Godinho stressed that working with influencers can be effective if done carefully, drawing parallels with traditional relationships between research organisations and journalists.

Further questions addressed international and regional perspectives, including trust in science in China and differences across Europe. Bauer cautioned against simplistic comparisons, noting China's strong technocratic context and the need for more granular data to understand variations within Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern regions.

The discussion also raised concerns about researcher burnout and research culture, linking trust in science to the conditions under which research is produced. Speakers acknowledged the importance of research integrity and community engagement, while recognising the structural pressures faced by researchers.

The final question explored how citizens could be supported to distinguish reliable scientific knowledge from misinformation. Speakers highlighted the importance of critical thinking, scientific and digital literacy, and cautioned against allowing disinformation concerns to overshadow the need for open debate and public participation.

Conclusion

The session concluded that Europe appears to remain in a relatively strong position in terms of public trust in science, but that this cannot be taken for granted. Rather than responding to alarmist narratives, speakers called for evidence-informed, collaborative approaches that recognise trust as a dynamic relationship shaped by institutional behaviour, communication practices, and broader societal change. For research organisations, the discussion underscored the importance of acting as reflective and collaborative stewards of trust within an increasingly complex science–society ecosystem.

SESSION 2

Trust in Science under Pressure in an Era of Controversy and Disruptive Technological Change

Keynote

- **Dame Wendy Hall DBE**, Regius Professor of Computer Science, Associate Vice President (International Engagement) and Director of the Web Science Institute at the University of Southampton (online)

Speakers

- **Agnès Buzyn**, President of Evidences, former French Minister of Solidarity and Health
- **Romain Huret**, President and Head of Studies, School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), France
- **Rebecca Veitch**, Head of Research Integrity, UK Research & Innovation

Moderator

- **Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes**, Vice-President for International Affairs, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); Vice-President, Science Europe

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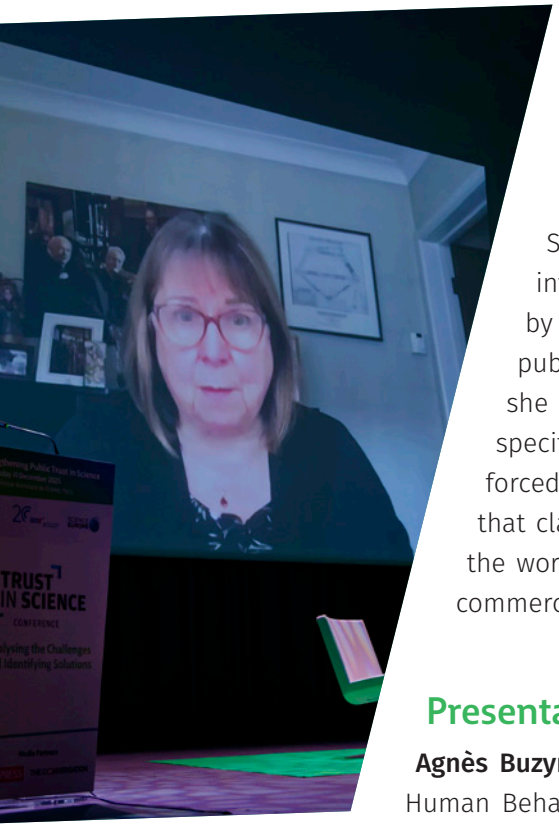
Key points

- AI should be regulated, as with other global infrastructures that could cause harm. Human rights and values should be prioritised in this process.
- Understanding how science works requires education about the scientific method, including how expertise is assessed and knowledge is validated, and this should be proactively promoted.
- Trust also depends on consistent standards of integrity and transparency across the research system (from funders and institutions to publishers), including clear guidance on the responsible use of AI.
- There is a shift in knowledge production centres: universities are no longer the sole hub, and corporations are increasingly seen as primary sites of innovation. Exchange between the two is necessary and should be pursued more actively.
- In an attention-driven information environment, dominant narratives – often shaped by emotion, values, and competing interests – can outweigh factual accuracy.

Keynote Speech

Dame Wendy Hall DBE, Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton, reflected on trust in science through the lens of rapid AI development and governance. She criticised extreme narratives that present AI either as solutionism or as an existential threat, noting that the public 'ChatGPT moment' heightened confusion when companies promoted transformative potential while also emphasising catastrophic risks. In her view, generative AI was released



in a largely unregulated space, unlike other sectors where safety and liability are embedded in oversight and practice.

She highlighted the geopolitical context of AI regulation and investment, and warned that open source availability, misuse by hostile actors, and military applications further complicate public confidence. Drawing on examples from medical imaging, she noted that even when AI systems outperform humans in specific tasks, human oversight remains essential and is reinforced by established health-and-safety processes. She concluded that claims that generative AI will inevitably replace large parts of the workforce should be treated with caution, as they often reflect commercial incentives rather than evidence-based projections.

Presentations

Agnès Buzyn highlighted findings from a recent publication in Nature Human Behaviour, noting that while many respondents express trust in science, trust decreases when questions address scientific integrity and potential conflicts of interest. In France, she noted that only 56% of the public consider scientists to be honest, and that many citizens struggle to distinguish between individual 'experts' and the scientific method. She also pointed to confusion about what counts as science, including survey results suggesting that a substantial share of young people in France consider astrology to be scientific.

Drawing on the Covid-19 experience, she argued that the public often lacks visibility on how peer review, replication, and debate shape scientific conclusions over time. She stressed that the information environment is designed to reward engagement and emotion, leaving citizens exposed to misleading claims. She cited surveys indicating that many people feel unable to reliably distinguish true from false information. She called for stronger education on scientific methods and for institutions to take a more proactive role in countering misinformation with accessible, reliable content.

Romain Huret provided a historical perspective, referencing Richard Hofstadter's analysis of anti-intellectualism in the United States and the post-World War II 'golden age' of science and expertise. He described successive waves of contestation: first, the emergence of counter-expertise and grassroots questioning of scientific authority on issues such as the environment and nuclear policy, and later, more overt political attacks on universities and experts. He argued that these dynamics have been amplified by a transformed public sphere shaped by social networks, where visibility can outweigh training and institutional credibility. He expressed concern that universities are no longer the sole centres of knowledge production and may struggle to maintain their position without new forms of co-operation.

To address this, he proposed three actions: increasing citizen participation in the construction of scientific knowledge, teaching the principles and rules of science (including how controversies

are resolved through confirmation), and exploring how universities can co-operate with major knowledge-producing entities such as corporations. He also emphasised that science depends on time (for deliberation, validation, and scholarly work) and that rebuilding trust will require a renewed narrative of science as a contributor to tangible progress and a better future.

Rebecca Veitch approached trust as something that must hold across the research system: from funders, through institutions and researchers, to publishers and wider society. She referred to established frameworks on research integrity and responsible conduct (including those developed by UK Research and Innovation, the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, and others), and invited reflection on how existing policies and processes apply in the context of rapidly evolving AI tools.

She highlighted the importance of disciplinary communities evaluating rigour and risk, and noted that trust requires a degree of vulnerability, including acknowledging uncertainty and limits to current knowledge. She also stressed that inconsistent guidance across funders, institutions, and publishers can create unnecessary burden and stress for researchers, and that clearer, more coherent expectations are needed – particularly for international collaborations.

Discussion

Moderator Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes opened the discussion with a question on what it means to produce science today, noting that public attention and opinion are increasingly shaped by dominant narratives in an 'economy of attention', often driven by economic or (geo)political interests.

In response, Dame Wendy argued that public confusion mirrors uncertainty among political leaders, and highlighted a widening gap between foundational 'blue sky' research in universities and industry-driven innovation, noting recent examples of co-operation between governments and large technology companies.

It was noted that social media and other platforms often amplify emotionally triggering content over the neutral tone of most scientific communication, and that the volume of information available limits citizens' ability to verify sources. This creates fertile ground for misinformation and undermines confidence in scientific expertise.

An audience intervention challenged a purely information-based approach to trust, arguing that acceptance of evidence is often mediated by values and identity (for example, in vaccination debates). In response, panellists emphasised the need for robust research integrity processes, clearer explanations of how science validates knowledge, and greater involvement of social sciences in understanding how beliefs form and spread.

The discussion suggested that research institutions should be more proactive in promoting reliable knowledge and addressing misleading claims, while recognising that it is not always realistic or fair to expect individual researchers to take on significant additional communication roles.

Another question focused on whether scientists and institutions should attempt to 'control the narrative' to ensure a dominant pro-science perspective, and raised questions about trust within international scientific collaboration, including concerns about foreign interference and knowledge or IP leakage.

Discussion then turned to the future role of universities and their relationships with major technology companies. Huret noted that collaboration is often unavoidable and recalled that, during the so-called golden age of science, progress depended on a tripartite relationship among scientists, industry, and the state, with scientists in the lead. Today, however, competition for visibility and public attention can place universities at a disadvantage and complicate national research agendas.

Veitch added that research funding organisations should make themselves more available and improve routes for relevant research evidence to reach policy and governance audiences. Finally, Dame Wendy warned that high-stakes issues such as climate change can provoke public

backlash when the costs of policy responses are felt directly by citizens, further entangling trust in science with political debate.

Overall, both panellists and audience members agreed that trust in science cannot be strengthened through information alone, but is shaped by people's values and the wider environment in which information is shared. The discussion highlighted the challenges of fast-moving, emotionally driven online spaces, as well as the growing links between science, politics, and economic interests.

Building trust was seen to require strong research integrity, clearer explanations of how science works, and more co-ordinated efforts from the research community to engage with society. At the same time, participants noted that this responsibility should not fall on individual researchers alone, but needs to be supported at an institutional level.

Conclusion

The discussion made clear that trust in science is shaped by more than the communication of evidence alone. It depends on how scientific knowledge is produced, governed, and embedded within wider social and political contexts. Rapid developments in artificial intelligence have intensified these dynamics, highlighting the need for transparency, integrity, and consistent standards across the research system, including from research funding and performing organisations and publishers. Education about the scientific method, including uncertainty and validation over time, was identified as a key condition for sustaining trust.

The speakers also emphasised that trust is influenced by values, narratives, and the broader information environment, where emotionally driven and competing interests can outweigh factual accuracy. In this context, institutions were seen as having a central role in promoting reliable knowledge and addressing misleading claims, while avoiding unrealistic expectations on individual researchers. As universities increasingly interact with industry and other knowledge-producing actors, preserving scientific independence and a clear public-interest role was viewed as essential to maintaining trust in science as a shared endeavour.

SESSION 3

Strengthening Trust through Public Engagement

Keynote

- **Jerry Sheehan**, Director, Directorate for Science Technology and Innovation, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Speakers

- **Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan**, Founder of SciCommAI; Co-founder of the Arab Forum of Science Media and Communication (AFSMC); Former Vice-President of the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) Network
- **Pampa Garcia Molina**, Co-ordinator of the Science Media Centre, Spain
- **Emelie de Jong**, Director, France Culture
- **Hugo Mercier**, Senior Researcher, Jean Nicod Institute, (CNRS, ENS, PSL); Scientific Director, AI and Society Institute (ENS, PSL, Paris Dauphine), Paris, France

Moderator

- **Lidia Borrell-Damián**, Secretary General, Science Europe

Key points

- Trust in science is a democratic and societal issue, not only a scientific one. Trust in science is increasingly shaped by broader political, technological, and geopolitical dynamics, making it central to democratic resilience and societal stability.
- Trust relies on strong links between science, society, and policy. Maintaining trust requires reinforcing the connections between scientific institutions, public engagement, and evidence-informed policy, particularly in the face of polarisation and misinformation.
- Core scientific values remain essential in times of rapid change. Openness, autonomy, rigour, and integrity must be upheld while engaging responsibly with emerging technologies and adapting governance frameworks.
- Responsible science communication is a key enabler of trust. Trust depends on transparent, inclusive, accountable, and timely communication, guided by clear principles and an honest presentation of uncertainty and evidence.
- Trust in science is context-dependent and cannot be universally measured. Cultural, linguistic, and institutional differences shape how trust in science is understood and experienced, limiting the usefulness of uniform metrics or deficit-based approaches.
- Trust is built through engagement, consensus, and visible processes. Trust is reinforced through participatory approaches, expert consensus, mutual respect between scientists and communicators, and clearer role definitions that enhance credibility and public understanding.

Watch the recording →

Keynote Speech

Jerry Sheehan's keynote speech placed trust in science within a broader societal and political landscape. He emphasised that trust is one of the most fundamental challenges not only faced by science, but by democracies at large. Rapid technological advancement, coupled with increasing geopolitical emphasis on sovereignty and competitiveness, has placed additional strain on already fragile trust relationships.

Sheehan argued that science both suffers from these pressures and plays a critical role in addressing them. He described trust as resting on a delicate triangle between science, society, and policy, noting that this balance is increasingly tested by polarisation, misinformation, and deliberate attempts to weaken the links between evidence and decision making. Strengthening trust therefore requires reinforcing these connections and ensuring that science remains grounded in shared values, particularly during periods of rapid change.

A central theme of his intervention was the need to preserve the traditional values of science, including openness, autonomy, rigour, and integrity, while responsibly engaging with emerging technologies. The OECD has provided a framework for governments, other innovation actors and societies to anticipate governance challenges, and build longer-term capacities to shape innovation more effectively.

Transparency, he stressed, is essential for enabling scrutiny and accountability, but it must be accompanied by effective and responsible communication if it is to foster trust rather than confusion. It is the first of 6 principles developed by the OECD on communicating science responsibly:

1. **Transparency:** providing access to data on which scientific conclusions depend; describing clearly the methods and data used to reach a conclusion; communicating uncertainties.
2. **Inclusivity:** reaching out to diverse groups in society; making science communications accessible (e.g. taking into account digital infrastructure and language barriers).
3. **Integrity:** adhering to ethical and professional standards in scientific research and communication being intellectually honest (e.g. not hyping scientific results) and ensuring the rigour of the research that is being communicated.
4. **Accountability:** making clear who is responsible for a scientific communication and in what capacity they are communicating (e.g. personal or institu-

tional; subject expert or scientific commentator); being clear on the sources that underpin a scientific communication; openly declaring any potential conflicts of interest or commitment for those communicating, or providing the content of scientific communications.

5. **Freedom and autonomy:** This includes communicating scientific research without being constrained by external interference (e.g. political, legal, religious); respecting the self-governance of academic research and right of scientists to freely communicate (in accordance with principles 1–4).
6. **Timeliness:** This is particularly relevant in emergency situations and includes delivering relevant and up-to-date information to citizens in a timely manner, with appropriate caveats where necessary; not withholding or delaying the communication of relevant scientific information, while ensuring that essential quality controls have been performed prior to its release.

Trust in science, he concluded, is a responsibility shared by all stakeholders and must encompass not only scientific results, but also the processes, uncertainties, and ethical foundations of research. Sheehan also highlighted the growing relevance of citizen science, arguing that citizens contribute valuable insights both to scientific knowledge production and to shaping research agendas. This, he suggested, calls for science and research policies that are more accommodating of participatory approaches and societal engagement.

Presentations

The following panel session explored how trust in science is understood and experienced across different cultural, social, and institutional settings.

Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan challenged several commonly held assumptions underpinning discussions of trust in science. Drawing on experiences from the Global South, he questioned the idea that democratic systems automatically foster trust in science, noting that declining democratic norms can erode confidence in institutions, including scientific ones. He also high-

lighted the absence of a universal definition of 'science', pointing out that linguistic and cultural differences shape how science and trust are understood. Finally, he cautioned against the uncritical use of quantitative measures of trust, arguing that such metrics may not be meaningful or transferable across regions and languages.

Pampa Garcia Molina emphasised that trust in science is crucial both for equitable access to knowledge and for the functioning of democracies. Referring to a recent study on Trust in Science and Science-related Populism, she noted that societies with higher levels of trust in science responded more effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, she warned against continued reliance on the deficit model of science communication, stressing that levels of trust cannot be simply correlated with levels of education or information. Instead, she argued for approaches that recognise the active role of science journalists and communicators in accompanying publics, addressing concerns, and fostering long-term engagement.

From a media perspective, **Emelie de Jong** described the editorial approach of France Culture, where all content is grounded in evidence and knowledge. Despite broader challenges to public trust in France, she noted that audience figures for France Culture are increasing, even as radio listenership declines overall. This, she argued, demonstrates a sustained public appetite for reliable, in-depth, and contextualised knowledge-based media.

Hugo Mercier presented research findings showing that trust in science does not primarily depend on individual scientific literacy. Rather, people often trust science because they observe expert consensus, even when they do not fully understand the underlying evidence. He noted that while individuals may express scepticism towards science in general, they continue to accept the vast majority of established scientific facts. Long-term exposure to scientific education, he argued, plays a key role in sustaining trust and these insights can be used to address contested issues such as climate change.

Discussion

The panel discussion focused on the relationship between scientists, journalists, and communicators, and how this relationship can support or undermine trust in science. The panellists broadly agreed that while the relationship is essential, it remains uneven and at times fragile. Mercier noted that journalism is often drawn to striking or novel findings, which can risk oversimplification or overstatement. Scientists, he argued, can help by providing context and by clearly communicating the rigour and limitations of research.

De Jong emphasised that transparency is central to productive collaboration, including openness about uncertainty and the provisional nature of scientific

knowledge. Garcia Molina highlighted the importance of mutual respect, recognising the distinct expertise of scientists and journalists, and the need for scientists to communicate in accessible and engaging ways without compromising accuracy.

Ramadan reflected on lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, noting that while it demonstrated the importance of science journalism, it also exposed mutual mistrust, including fears among scientists of being misquoted or misrepresented. He suggested greater engagement and dialogue, including opportunities for scientists to participate in journalism training.

Sheehan observed that scientists tend to communicate primarily with other scientists, whereas journalists can help connect scientific expertise to pressing societal questions. He suggested that making scientific debate more visible, including through televised discussions, could help the public better understand the scientific process, including disagreement and uncertainty, while cautioning against the persistent risks of hype.

Audience questions highlighted structural challenges affecting trust in science communication. A discussion on the distinction between science journalism and science communication revealed concerns that blurred roles can undermine credibility. Speakers emphasised the importance of transparency, clear role definitions, and the development of appropriate professional standards and codes of conduct.

Questions on how to measure trust in science underscored the complexity of the issue. Longitudinal studies were identified as particularly important, alongside improved understanding of how citizens distinguish reliable from unreliable information.

Conclusion

The session showed that trust in science is shaped by wider social, political, and communication contexts, not by scientific evidence alone. Trust depends on strong connections between science, society, and policy, and on visible commitments to openness, integrity, and responsible conduct, particularly in periods of rapid technological and political change. Speakers agreed that trust is weakened when these links are strained by polarisation, misinformation, or unclear roles and responsibilities.

The discussion also made clear that trust cannot be built through information alone or captured by simple metrics. It grows through transparent processes, shared standards, and constructive relationships between scientists, journalists, communicators, and citizens. Clear communication of uncertainty, respect for different forms of expertise, and sustained engagement – including participatory approaches such as citizen science – were identified as practical ways to strengthen trust over time. Overall, the session reinforced the view that trust in science is a shared responsibility, requiring ongoing effort across research, media, and policy communities.

SESSION 4

Institutional and Policy Responses to Strengthen Trust in Science

Speakers

- **David Budtz Pedersen**, Professor of Science Communication, Aalborg University, Denmark
- **Karen Fabbri**, Deputy Head of Unit Science for Policy, Advice and Ethics, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission
- **Anu Noorma**, Director General of the Estonian Research Council (ETAG)
- **Antoine Petit**, President and CEO, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)

Moderator

- **Carthage Smith**, Senior Policy Analyst, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Watch the recording →

Key Points

- Trust in science cannot be taken for granted and must be actively built. Trust is shaped by broader societal change and requires sustained institutional effort rather than one-off communication activities.
- The key audience is the large, questioning middle of society. Efforts should focus on citizens who are open but uncertain, rather than on small, highly vocal groups that actively reject science.
- Scientists need institutional support to engage safely and effectively. Public engagement brings risks, particularly in polarised contexts, and research funding and performing organisations have a responsibility to provide guidance, protection, and training.
- One-way communication is insufficient to build trust. Participatory and co-creative approaches that value different forms of knowledge are essential to meaningful engagement.
- Trust-building must be embedded upstream in policy and funding design. Engagement and citizen participation are most effective when integrated into research strategies, funding calls, and policy processes from the outset.

Presentations

The closing session explored the role of research and performing organisations and policy makers in strengthening trust in science, with particular attention to communication, engagement, institutional responsibility, and policy design. Speakers reflected on empirical evidence, practical experience, and policy initiatives at national, European, and international levels. A recurring theme was that trust in science cannot be taken for granted and cannot be maintained through communication alone; rather, it requires sustained institutional support, inclusive engagement, and attention to values, safety, and context.

Antoine Petit emphasised that trust in science should not be framed as a binary divide between trust and mistrust. While a small but vocal minority actively distrusts science, he argued that the key challenge lies with the much larger group of citizens who neither fully distrust nor fully understand science. This group, which may ask questions or express uncertainty, represents the most important audience for scientific communication and engagement.

Petit cautioned against focusing disproportionate effort on those who are firmly opposed to science. Instead, research funding and performing organisations should concentrate on enabling scientists to communicate effectively with the broad middle of society, supporting dialogue rather than persuasion, and recognising that contemporary citizens increasingly acquire knowledge independently and expect to engage critically.

He described the development of *Le guide d'expression publique*, a guidance document created in response to needs expressed by scientists. It supports researchers in navigating public communication, including clarifying when they are speaking as subject-matter experts and when they are expressing personal views as citizens. He stressed the importance of distinguishing facts from values, particularly in areas such as climate change, where scientific evidence is often entangled with political debate.

The panel acknowledged that public engagement can carry personal and professional risks for researchers. Petit noted cases of harassment and media pressure faced by scientists, particularly in polarised fields, and emphasised the responsibility of institutions to provide legal, professional, and moral support. Leaving individual researchers to manage these risks alone, he argued, undermines both trust in science and willingness to engage.

David Budtz Pedersen reinforced this point, observing that not every context is suitable for engagement. In highly polarised debates, communication may backfire, particularly on social media. Institutions should help researchers assess when and how to engage, and when it may be appropriate to pause or withdraw, rather than assuming constant visibility is always beneficial.

A strong consensus emerged that traditional outreach models are insufficient to build durable trust. Speakers repeatedly stressed the need to move beyond one-way communication towards participatory and co-creative approaches.

Petit argued that engagement should not reduce scientists to explainers of established facts for already-convinced audiences. Instead, meaningful co-creation requires recognising that both scientists and citizens bring valuable forms of knowledge to the table. However, he cautioned that participatory initiatives alone are not a panacea, particularly if they remain limited in scale or fail to reach beyond already engaged groups.

Pedersen expanded on this perspective, warning that the research community often operates within its own mental models, speaking to society from within a conceptual 'fishbowl'. Scepticism towards science is not per se irrational: it can be rooted in deeper scepticism towards governments and capitalist systems that do not serve all citizens equally well. In recent decades, science has become almost entirely immersed with capitalist and commercial logics (eg. biotechnology, pharma, artificial intelligence) that do not benefit citizens equally. This fusion between scientific, market, and government institutions can create some well-founded sceptical beliefs about science as a public good and scientists as honest brokers.

Trust, he argued, is grounded in values and identity: people are more likely to trust those who appear to understand their lived realities and share their concerns. Related to this is the fact that trust is predicated on who we trust, and we tend to trust people and institutions we are convinced serve our interests and share our values. For science communication, this means that more diverse represetnation of scientific voices should be encouraged. With increased diversity across genders, disciplines, and profiles, science can better connect to citizens.

Research funding and performing organisations therefore need to invest in listening as much as communicating, asking what problems people want science to help solve, and engaging with diverse forms of expertise, including professional, practical, local, and indigenous knowledge. He also emphasised that in collaborative problem-solving, scientific knowledge should not automatically dominate; rather, it should interact with other knowledge systems to generate credible solutions that are responsive to people's needs.

Anu Noorma reflected on trust in science from the perspective of Estonia and the wider Baltic region, where trust in science remains comparatively high. She cautioned, however, that broader societal changes are reshaping trust dynamics and raising fundamental questions about whether societies are moving towards greater collective capacity or long-term fragmentation.

Noorma highlighted several practical tools used in Estonia to strengthen trust, including a highly popular science television programme reaching both children and parents developed by the Estonian Research Council,

national awards for science communication, and the integration of science advisors across government ministries. She stressed the importance of communicating not only scientific results, but also the process of doing science, including personal narratives that humanise researchers and make scientific work more relatable.

International collaboration was identified as essential, particularly for smaller countries. Noorma noted Estonia's accession to the European Space Agency as a turning point for both scientific development and public engagement, illustrating how international integration can reinforce domestic trust in science.

Karen Fabbri provided insights from European Commission initiatives, emphasising that trust-building measures are most effective when designed upstream in policy and funding frameworks. She described the Voices project, which used local focus groups across EU Member States to gather societal input into research and innovation priorities. This process directly influenced funding decisions, including substantial investment in urban waste research, demonstrating that citizen input can meaningfully shape policy outcomes when embedded properly.

Fabbri also highlighted efforts to integrate multi-actor engagement into research strategies, such as those addressing food systems, and stressed the need to build capacity among local actors to participate effectively. She underlined that public engagement should not be treated as an add-on, but as a core component of research design, supported by appropriate incentives and resources.

At the European level, Fabbri pointed to several ERA Actions relevant to trust in science, including initiatives on citizen engagement, science communication, and science for policy. These include mutual learning exercises among EU Member States to bring together government representatives to review their national public engagement strategies and exchange best practices. Many Horizon Europe Missions include living and policy labs that include multi-actor and citizen engagement. She highlighted some of the lessons learned from these activities and welcomed governments to develop national public engagement strategies to build capacity and foster cross-national exchanges of good practice. She highlighted science for policy in the European Commission and the important role of initiatives such as its Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM), as well as the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) in translating scientific evidence into timely and relevant policy advice. The European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025–2027 includes a dedicated action on advancing the European science-for-policy ecosystem, which incorporates the establishment of a network of correspondents on science for policy, as well as an observatory and a community of practice.

Discussion

The discussion repeatedly returned to the intermediary role of policy makers, who sit between scientists and citizens. Trust in science, participants agreed, is closely linked to trust in policy processes and institutions. Effective science advice therefore requires not only sound evidence, but also careful consideration of context, responsibility, and communication.

Questions from the audience raised the issue of whether scientists should provide facts alone or also offer recommendations. Petit argued that policy advice ultimately involves value-based trade-offs beyond the remit of science, and that scientists should avoid assuming decision making authority. Pedersen acknowledged that advice can be valuable, but stressed that it requires specific skills and ethical awareness to avoid advocacy or ideological bias. Fabbri reinforced that advice carries responsibility and must be delivered with clarity about roles and limitations.

Other questions highlighted inclusivity as a critical dimension of trust. Speakers noted that groups expressing lower trust in science often include minorities who may feel underrepresented within research systems. Addressing this requires diversifying scientific careers, recognising a wider range of contributions, and rewarding engagement and communication alongside traditional academic outputs.

Education was also identified as an underexplored factor in the discussion. Noorma noted that researchers themselves are citizens who must trust their own capacity to operate in a global system, particularly as expectations around mobility, communication, and policy engagement increase.

Conclusion

The panel discussion underscored that strengthening trust in science is a shared, long-term responsibility requiring co-ordinated action by research funding and performing organisations, policy makers, and researchers. Key messages included the need to support and protect scientists who engage publicly, to prioritise two-way engagement , to design participation and engagement from the outset in funding and policy frameworks, and to recognise the diversity of knowledge and values within society.

Rather than treating trust as something to be restored through communications alone, the discussion highlighted trust as something to be built through relationships, shared problem-solving, and institutional commitment, at local, national, and international levels.

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ANNEX 1

Programme

Thursday 11 December 2025

09.00–09.25 **Welcome and Introduction**

This session will outline the objectives and themes of the conference, addressing the importance of building and maintaining public trust in science to support the pursuit of scientific knowledge to advance societal progress.

It will illustrate how trust can underpin the development of evidence-based public policies and democratic decision making, and the role of research funding and research performing organisations in these.

- **Claire Giry**, Chairman and Director General, French National Research Agency (ANR)
- **Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes**, Vice-President for International Affairs, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); Vice-President, Science Europe
- **Ezra Clark**, Chief of the Science Technology and Innovation Policy Section, UNESCO

09.25–09.45 **Keynote Speech**

- **Kei Koizumi**, Former Principal Deputy Director for Science, Society, and Policy at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)

09.45–11.00 **Session 1: Europe, Science and Society – Understanding the Trust Relationship and Factors Supporting Public Trust in Science**

This session will provide an overview of public trust in science across Europe, drawing on key findings from major European and national studies. It will explore how scientific knowledge and critical thinking are considered; ways of building trust; how trust levels vary across countries and demographic groups; and what this means for scientific literacy and public understanding of the scientific method.

The session will also examine the key challenges that undermine trust in science, eroding public confidence, as well as how trust in science is shaped by cultural institutions, the media, and social networks.

- Drawing on your experience and/or the research you've been involved in, how would you describe the current state of public trust in science across Europe and globally?
- What in your view is the most important factor influencing trust in science?
- What does this mean for understanding of, and communicating the scientific method, and scientific literacy?

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Speakers

- **Martin Bauer**, Professor of Social Psychology and Research Methodology, London School of Economics
- **Ana Godinho**, Head of Communications & Engagement, European Spallation Source, Sweden
- **Agata Gurzawska**, Cluster Lead - Ethics, Human Rights and New Technologies, Trilateral Research
- **Kei Koizumi**, Former Principal Deputy Director for Science, Society, and Policy at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)

Moderator

- **Michel Dubois**, Senior Research Fellow, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS); Director, GEMASS

11.00–11.30 *Coffee Break*

11.30–12.45 **Session 2: Trust in Science under pressure in an Era of Controversy and Disruptive Technological Change**

This session will explore how moments of controversy, uncertainty, or rapid technological change affect scientific credibility. It will examine the dynamics of trust in selected scientific domains, and why some scientific theories gain public and political traction while others are contested or ignored.

In particular, it will examine how policies in other areas such as research ethics or scientific integrity, contribute to building and maintaining credibility.

- How do controversial scientific advances or technological breakthroughs influence and impact public trust in science?
- What is the role of different actors in addressing challenges of bias, reproducibility, or conflicts of interest?
- How can researchers and institutions better communicate uncertainty and complexity?

Keynote

- **Dame Wendy Hall DBE**, Regius Professor of Computer Science, Associate Vice President (International Engagement) and Director of the Web Science Institute at the University of Southampton *(online)*

Speakers

- **Agnès Buzyn**, President of Evidences, former French Minister of Solidarity and Health
- **Romain Huret**, President and Director of Studies, School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), France
- **Didier Pourquery**, President, The Conversation, France
- **Rebecca Veitch**, Head of Research Integrity, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

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Moderator

- **Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes**, Vice-President for International Affairs, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); Vice-President, Science Europe

12.45–14.00 *Lunch*

14.00–15.30 **Session 3: Strengthening Trust through Public Engagement**

This session will explore whether and to what extent public trust depends on the belief that science serves the public good and where and how such alignment between science and values should occur, and what happens when these values conflict. It will highlight the importance of open dialogue, media engagement, and participatory research in fostering greater trust between the scientific community and society.

- Which values are essential to building and maintaining public trust?
- How can scientists and journalists work together to improve the accuracy, relevance, and impact of scientific reporting?
- What is the role of participatory and citizen science in improving public engagement?

Keynote

- **Jerry Sheehan**, Director, Directorate for Science Technology and Innovation, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Speakers

- **Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan**, Founder of SciCommAI; Co-founder of the Arab Forum of Science Media and Communication (AFSMC); Former Vice-President of the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) Network
- **Pampa Garcia Molina**, Co-ordinator of the Science Media Centre, Spain
- **Emelie de Jong**, Director, France Culture
- **Hugo Mercier**, Senior Researcher, Institut Jean Nicod, (CNRS, ENS, PSL); Scientific Director, AI and Society Institute (ENS, PSL, Paris Dauphine), Paris, France

Moderator

- **Lidia Borrell-Damián**, Secretary General, Science Europe

15.30–16.00 *Coffee Break*

16.00–17.15 **Session 4: Institutional and Policy Responses to Strengthen Trust in Science**

This session will explore how research funding and performing organisations and policy makers can actively contribute to building public trust in science. It will discuss their shared responsibility to promote transparency and integrity while helping researchers participate in the public debate without fear of abuse or intimidation. It will also identify effective institutional and policy solutions to strengthen public trust in science.

- How can research funding and performing organisations enhance public trust in science and support and protect researchers?
- How can research funding and performing organisations work with policy makers to strengthen the science-society dialogue to reinforce trust in science?
- How can research performing and funding organisations better engage with media to combat misinformation and ensure responsible science reporting?

Speakers

- **David Budtz Pedersen**, Professor of Science Communication, Aalborg University, Denmark
- **Karen Fabbri**, Deputy Head of Unit Science for Policy, Advice and Ethics, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission
- **Anu Noorma**, Director General of the Estonian Research Council (ETAG)
- **Antoine Petit**, President and CEO, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)

Moderator

- **Carthage Smith**, Senior Policy Expert, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

17.15–17.30 **Conclusions and Next Steps**

Summing up the discussions of the conference and outlining the next steps.

- **Claire Giry**, Chairman and Director General, French National Research Agency (ANR)
- **Lidia Borrell-Damián**, Secretary General, Science Europe

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ANNEX 2

Trust in Science Initiatives by Member Organisations

During the conference, a number of initiatives related to improving public trust in science by Science Europe Member Organisations were presented through the following posters.

Mediatization of scientists – implications for public trust

Estonian Research Council (ETAG)

Does media visibility support trust for researchers?

Well, we do not know. There has not been specific research looking at this question.

However, **media visibility is considered a key objective** in many science communication policies, often **associating better visibility with more trust**. Estonian Research Council, for example, funds several science TV programs.

There are good reasons to believe it works. But not any media visibility by any researcher will support public trust. What is needed to make it work?

Not any media visibility by any researcher will support public trust. We should identify and support the most effective policies of trust-building visibility.

This poster introduces some research results by **Arko Olesk (Tallinn University)** that help us to explore these issues.

The Small Countries' Dilemma

Small countries face a dilemma in science policy: if they focus on high-level research, they may **risk having limited local relevance**. If they focus too much on local issues, in terms of both their publishing and impact work, they **risk international isolation** (Ukrainski et al., 2014).

In science communication, the small countries' dilemma presents itself in an additional version: for communicating scientists, **trust is achieved both by displaying competence and by building a relationship with the audience**. The first presumes scientific excellence and therefore fluency in the English-dominated academic world. The second cannot be achieved without knowledge of the local language and the local context (Kivimäki & Olesk, 2025).

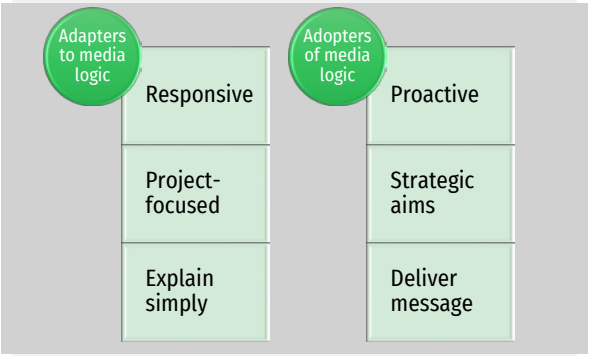
Researchers in small countries, therefore, not only need to balance their research focus, but also to navigate between languages to maximise their communication impact.

Mediatization of scientists

Scientists who are highly visible in media have gained **knowledge about how to effectively interact with journalists**. They can present science in an engaging way or even behave in ways that increase their chances of gaining media visibility. In short, they have become mediatized.

The 2024 PhD thesis of Arko Olesk defines five indicators that can be used to characterize the intensity of mediatization. The indicators can be used to the identify mediatization patterns of individual researchers. These reveal the **different functional ways** in which researchers can be present in media.

Olesk outlines **two basic types** of mediatized researchers. „If they are primarily interested in explaining their subject in a comprehensible way, they need **different media skills and techniques** than if their aim is to guide a public debate," he explains.



The different ways in which researchers are present in media also **vary in the extent to which they benefit** the institutions, the researchers, the journalists or the public – therefore, in how it build trust for science.

Policy impact: Given the different dimensions of trust (e.g, Reif et al., 2025) and the different functions of media presence, we should **identify and support** the most effective ways of trust-building visibility.

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Investing in your future

Bringing Science Closer to Society

Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)

Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal

Introduction

The Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia – FCT *(Foundation for Science and Technology)* is the Portuguese public agency for funding and supporting research in science, technology and innovation in all areas of knowledge, under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation.

A part of FCT's mission is to encourage the dissemination of scientific knowledge to contribute to the development of society. Although most of its communication is primarily aimed at the scientific community, FCT participates in various initiatives that play a key role in raising awareness to the importance of science and building trust in science among the general public.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, these initiatives were reinforced, mainly because, during this period, all scientific events were broadcast online and became open to the general public. This trend continued after the pandemic, with events not only being broadcast online, but also made available on platforms such as YouTube or EDUCAST (FCT's platform), so that they can be watched by the public at any time.

FCT promotes science among the general public in three main domains: Events (conferences, meetings, seminars), Science and technology awards, collaboration with the media and social networks.

Highlights of initiatives

Ciência 2025 - Science Meeting
Held annually in a different city each year, this event is a stage for showcasing the best in science, technology and innovation (ST&I) in Portugal and internationally. It is a three-day event promoting and discussing the scientific, social, cultural and economic impact of research, exploring the intersection between science, innovation and society. With the participation of numerous ST&I exhibitors, more than 60 scientific sessions, 200 speakers and between 1,500 and 2,000 participants, it is the most important science and technology meeting in Portugal.

90 Seconds of Science
A programme broadcast daily on the public radio station Antena 1, which gives a voice to researchers from all areas of knowledge and from across the country, who have 90 seconds to explain their research and its purpose to listeners. The programme has won several national awards and currently receives financial support from FCT.

Cycle "Archives of Knowledge: Science, History and Memory"
Monthly sessions, open to the public, with the aim of disseminating the history and memory of Science and Technology in Portugal and promoting the documentary collection of the FCT's Science and Technology Archive.

Science and Technology Awards

FCT collaborates with partner institutions in promoting and awarding prizes that recognise scientific excellence in various areas of knowledge. The awards attracts media attention, ensuring that the transformative power of science is communicated to the public.

João Monjardino Award of the Francisco Pulido Valente Foundation
Aimed at research, experimental development and innovation in the field of Biomedical Sciences and Health.

L'Oréal Portugal Medals of Honour for Women in Science
Aimed at the fields of Science, Engineering and Technology for Health or the Environment.

Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation Award
Promotes biodiversity conservation, restoration, and monitoring projects in Portugal with national and international impact.

Arquivo.pt Award
With a focus on projects carried out with information preserved and archived on the web by Arquivo.pt, a platform managed by FCT, encouraging the production of knowledge by the general public.

Mário Ruivo Award – Ocean Generations
Aimed at young people aged from 14 to 21, it encourages them to make films to raise awareness among younger generations about the role of the ocean.

Portuguese citizens' trust in science

According to the Eurobarometer 2025 report, Portugal ranks third in Europe in terms of confidence in the influence of science and technology on society. 92% of respondents consider this influence to be positive, with 78% considering it "fairly positive" and 14% "very positive".

Even though these results are very encouraging, it is important to continue promoting scientific communication and fighting misinformation. Ensuring that society remains informed and engaged is the only way to build trust in science and turn it into a driver for informed decisions and a sustainable future.

fct Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

Science and Your Life: Notice and Understand!

Science is present in every area of life. It seeks answers and solutions to the challenges in each person's daily life, which is why we invite everyone to notice and understand!

During the information campaign, the Latvian Council of Science introduces the wider public to the work carried out by Latvian researchers within the State Research Programme. The programme is developed in cooperation with sectoral ministries, identifying the needs that are essential for society and the state.

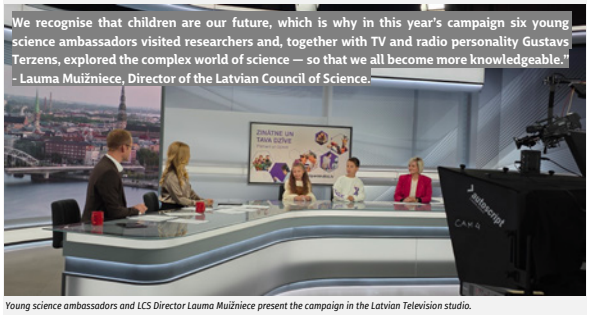
Campaign message: The mission of scientists and researchers is to improve your life — even when their work happens quietly or beyond what you can immediately see.

The campaign showcases only a small part of the knowledge, methods, and product prototypes created within the State Research Programme. It is built on researchers' own experience stories and summarised research findings, which will be published gradually from October to December this year.

We collaborated with TV and radio personality Gustavs Terzens and engaged six young science ambassadors who joined in visiting researchers.

Young science ambassadors together with Gustavs Terzens at the BIOR laboratory

"We recognise that children are our future, which is why in this year's campaign six young science ambassadors visited researchers and, together with TV and radio personality Gustavs Terzens, explored the complex world of science — so that we all become more knowledgeable."
- Lauma Muižniece, Director of the Latvian Council of Science.



Young science ambassadors and LCS Director Lauma Muižniece present the campaign in the Latvian Television studio.

Many scientific results are invisible in daily life — **the impact is real, but not always immediately noticeable,** which makes it harder to show why science matters right now. At the same time, public trust is shaken by misinformation, and scientists themselves are often hesitant to speak publicly. This campaign was created to break these barriers — turning research into clear, relatable stories that people can understand, trust and connect with.

Latvian Council of Science (LCS)

What we did:

- **Produced video stories** to explain science in a simple, human-focused way.
- **Issued original articles** and spin-off stories in major national media outlets
- **Organised an online discussion** with researchers, ministries and stakeholders
- **Launched the campaign microsite viegliparzinatni.lv** as the central information hub
- **Created thematic infographics** to visualise complex scientific outcomes
- **Delivered social media campaign and ran an interactive public contest** to boost engagement and audience participation
- **Organised meetings where scientists visited schools** to share their research findings with students.
- **Transformed a busy Old Town street into the "Street of Science"** for two months – an opportunity to explore the results of State Research Programme projects in Old Riga

Street of Science in Riga's Old Town, September 2025

At the exhibition, visitors were able to explore projects completed in 2024 and 2025 and learn how scientific results were transformed into practical solutions and innovations — from technology and medicine to language and environmental protection.

"Our shared task is to strengthen trust in science, boost researchers' confidence, and ensure that decisions of national importance are based on scientific evidence, not assumptions."

- Dace Melbārde, The Minister of Education and Science

Latvian Council of Science

One click to results

Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)

Making science easy to access

The results archive within the 42 Collaborative Research Projects, funded under the Romanian Research Programme, through the EEA and Norway Grants are presented in a single portal: https://eeanorway.uefiscdi.gov.ro. Under the motto "Working together for a green, competitive and inclusive Europe," the digital platform collect research-specific result indicators, including published articles, delivered conferences, and obtained patents. This effort contributes to a better understanding of the projects' impact on society, encouraging scientific and technological development.

Effortless access to structured research insights

The mobile-oriented portal simplifies access to the presentation of each project in a commune language, easy navigation, and clustering by thematic areas provide both researchers and the general public with the opportunity to discover up-to-date information and potential solutions to societal challenges. It also provides an overview of collaborations between researchers and the private sector, including the involved partners, offering a comprehensive picture of ongoing cooperative efforts and innovation networks in the donor and beneficiary countries.

Browsing through thematic areas

Spanning six key thematic areas: **energy, environment, health, ICT, biotechnology, social sciences and humanities,** the portal offers a diverse portfolio of projects addressing some of today's most pressing challenges. Users can delve into initiatives exploring geothermal energy sources; climate-sensitive ecological strategies; the discovery of new therapeutic targets for ear disorders and complex diseases such as schizophrenia; innovative therapies that promise to alleviate symptoms and restore normal brain function through non-invasive, easily applicable methodologies in Alzheimer's disease; and advanced medical software solutions for early cancer detection and treatment, among many others, all available to be discovered with just one click.

Integrated approach bringing Research in the spotlight

The platform acts as a central science communication tool, integrating all resources and initiatives developed under the Programme to present funded projects. Each project page features the video podcast 'Research in the Spotlight,' showcasing the principal investigators (PIs) and their teams. Launched in December 2021, the podcast highlights the societal challenges addressed by the projects, the potential solutions emerging from research, and the collaborative efforts between international partners to foster a sustainable, competitive, and inclusive Europe. By bringing together these initiatives, the portal offers a comprehensive and accessible overview of the programme's activities, making research outcomes visible to both the scientific community and the wider public

For researchers, it offers an opportunity to showcase their projects and encourages more active communication of their work. For the private sector, it serves as a source of inspiration, highlighting innovative solutions and potential areas for investment. Journalists can rely on it as a rich resource for accurate and up-to-date documentation, while the general public can explore and better understand the research shaping the world around them.

uefiscdi
Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding

Emergencies as opportunities to spread evidence to society

Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)

The role of CSIC as an emergency advisor

The Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), a public research organisation under the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, provides scientific advice in emergencies by activating a Disaster and Emergency Advisory Group (GADE). This protocol, approved in April 2024, mobilises teams of experts to assess risks, propose solutions (such as the creation of polymers for sludge) and improve crisis management in real time, addressing everything from initial risks to post-emergency recovery.

The work of CSIC in advising managers in emergencies is ultimately to convey scientific evidence to society

Following the emergency caused by the DANA, which mainly affected the Valencian Community (East of Spain) on 29 October 2024, CSIC advised the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, sent oceanographic vessels to assess the pollution and worked on developing solutions for the sludge. More recently, in August 2025, CSIC experts provided specific advice on managing the fire in the Las Médulas, in the El Bierzo region of León, Spain.

CSIC Continues Providing Scientific Support One Year After the DANA in Valencia

More than one year after the emergency caused by the DANA, CSIC continues providing scientific and technical support for the recovery and reconstruction of the affected areas through five research and knowledge-transfer projects. On 30 October 2024, CSIC activated its GADE to provide scientific and technical advice. In total, around 200 specialists from about 30 of the institution's 124 centres and institutes were mobilised. Their expertise covered fields including flooding, ground movement, water resources, health risks, social risks, waste management, marine impacts, infrastructure, geographic information systems, remote sensing, hydrogeology, and pollution.

CSIC also deployed two oceanographic vessels from the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) to the affected area: the *Ramón Margalef*, to study seabeds near the mouths of the Turia and Júcar rivers, and the *Francisco de Paula Navarro*, to assess contamination in marine sediments.

CSIC Provides Scientific and Technical Support in Areas Affected by Wildfires

On 11 August 2025, a wildfire broke out in the town of Yeres (León) and spread to the Las Médulas area on 12 and 13 August. During the emergency, Javier Madrigal, CSIC's Forest Risk Coordinator, Mercedes Guijarro from the Institute of Forest Sciences (ICIFOR-INIA), and Esther Hontañón from the Institute of Physical and Information Technologies provided on-the-ground expert guidance to the Foundation. This support was offered within the framework of the INTERREG SENFORFIRE project, in which the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage of the Regional Government of Castilla y León participates through the Las Médulas Foundation.

GADE has already begun work on the recovery of the Las Médulas Cultural Heritage Site, following the fire that started in the town of Yeres (León) and affected this protected landscape. In addition to Las Médulas, GADE is making the CSIC's scientific and technical capabilities available to all other areas impacted by the fires.

On 13 October 2025, the CSIC held the II Emergencies with Science Conference, a forum bringing together various emergency-response organisations and managers with the institution, with the goal of improving scientific advisory missions and fostering mutual collaboration.

CSIC
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

What can 24 surveys on trust in science tell us?

The Research Council of Norway (RCN)

From figures to new methods

Since 2019, the Research Council of Norway has carried out 24 national surveys (four times per year) measuring Norwegians' attitudes toward science. How can all this data help us gain better insight and renew the way we communicate about science? Since 2024, we have therefore cooperated with the Institute for Social Research in Oslo, analyzing our time-series mapping various aspects of trust. Lack of trust in science can lead to societal disagreement about what is true and untrue. At the same time, blindly high trust can result in a lack of critical debate and decisions based on shaky foundations.

The project investigates two overarching issues: Which perceptions and aspects of science are emphasized when people express trust or distrust? What explains people's attitudes to science, including trust and distrust?

Methodologically, the project analyzes existing time series from the Research Council and has also established a panel structure where the same individuals are followed over time.

From mapping to action

Overall, the project will generate new knowledge about trust in science in Norway from a comparative perspective and help develop activities connecting and strengthening researchers dialogue with stakeholders and citizens around the topic of science and its role in society.

Internationally, this type of research is dominated by studies from an American and British perspective. A study of trust in science in a Norwegian context will better equip us to understand the intersection between science and society and thus be useful for science communication - and the uptake of science in society of research results.

Main objectives:

- Develop new methods to measure people's attitudes to, perceptions of, and trust in science and related institutions and actors, including updated survey setups.
- Generate new knowledge about the Norwegian population's attitudes to - and trust in science.
- Help developing science communication and public engagement in order to secure and enhance trust in science and democratic governance. In a time where trust is increasingly under pressure and the role of science in policy making, is questioned, it is imperative to have in-depth knowledge.
- Facilitate future data collection on the Norwegian population's attitudes to, and trust in, science.

Early in 2026 we will start publishing the first results from the project. Please contact Thomas Evensen at the Research Council of Norway for updates – or if you have any questions.

Contact: tev@rcn.no or use the QR code to contact me on LinkedIn

The Research Council of Norway

TRUST IN SCIENCE

CONFERENCE

Science Europe and the French National Research Agency (ANR) organised the conference on Trust in Science on 11 December 2025. They aimed to explore key levers for action and practical solutions to promote open, transparent, and trustworthy science, by:

- **identifying** the factors that undermine public confidence in science, scientists and research institutions.
- **examining** the dynamics between science, society and the media in the dissemination of knowledge, scientific debates and public engagement.
- **sharing** best practices in science communication and public engagement.

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