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AFRICA

Open access article charge waiver for more than 100 journals

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The Lithuania-based Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), which aims to enable digital information access in developing country libraries, negotiated article processing charge waivers for 34 partner countries that will be valid until December 2022.

This initiative, which applies to 15 African countries, is part of International Open Access Week, 19-26 October, aimed at promoting open source scholarship by granting access to 111 World Scientific Publishing journals. It is poised to create publishing opportunities for academics who struggle to afford article processing charges (APCs).

“Most researchers already understand the benefit of publishing open access but lack the funding to pay for the article processing charges, so these special conditions should help them to publish their articles,” Romy Beard, the licensing programme manager of EIFL, told *University World News*.

Waivers range from 50% to 100%

Researchers in Botswana, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe are eligible for full waivers. So are others from Albania, Fiji, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Moldova, Myanmar, Nepal and North Macedonia.

Authors from Ethiopia and Uzbekistan could benefit from a 70% waiver. Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Palestine and Serbia will enjoy a 50% discount. All corresponding authors affiliated with an institution in one of the eligible countries will benefit from the waiver or discount. APCs with World Scientific publications range between US\$2,000 and US\$2,500.

The EIFL hopes that these special conditions will encourage more authors to submit their articles to World Scientific. The company is based in Singapore and publishes about 600 new titles a year, as well as 140 journals in various fields including chemistry, computer science, economics, finance and management, engineering, environmental science, materials science, mathematics, medical and life sciences, and physics.

While the current agreement covers 111 journals, most of the fully open access journals were excluded as they are owned by societies. Beard hoped that during the course of the agreement societies could agree to allow their journals to be included as well.

The EIFL open access programme advocates for collaborative non-APC publishing models and builds capacities to publish open access journals and set up open access repositories for publications and data in EIFL partner countries. Beard said the EIFL licensing programme has been discussing waived and discounted article processing charges with publishers since 2018, but has also been discussing other non-APC models such as publish and read offers with countrywide payments for reading and open access publishing.

Where researchers perform their work matters



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Elizabeth Marincola, senior advisor to the African Academy of Sciences and responsible for the Academy's publishing platform, AAS Open Research, believes waivers on article charges could be helpful. "APC waivers are clearly valuable to researchers in Africa, especially those who do not receive a budget for publication costs from their grant or research institute," she said.

"This is the case because the article processing charges of researchers who receive grants through the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa or the African Academy of Sciences enjoy a budget for publishing. If they publish on our own platform, AAS Open Research, we handle the administration of payment directly from their grant," said Marincola, the former chief executive officer of the large open access publisher PLOS.

The HINARI Access to Research for Health Programme was set up by the World Health Organization together with major publishers to address the problem of limited access to scientific publications. Some publishers waive the fees for authors from the lowest-income HINARI countries without any request at all; others will waive article processing charges for authors from these countries if there is a request from the author to do so, Marincola said.

African and researchers from other low- to middle-income countries do request waivers, and often receive them, fully or partially, she said. The key factors that a publisher may look for when considering a waiver request are what country the corresponding author is from and where they perform their work, not their country of origin or ethnicity and the magnitude and nature of the funding they receive for their work.

"Moreover, some publishers will only consider such a request if the submission has already been editorially accepted. Others will grant them conditional waivers subject to editorial acceptance," Marincola told *University World News*.

African researchers excluded

In the September editorial of the British Medical Journal Global Health, four African health researchers who are based in the Congo, South Africa and Australia said article processing charges were "systematically excluding African researchers from publishing in high impact open access journals".

Researchers in Africa are typically not in a position to have access to grants that cover publishing charges. They noted that local research grant initiatives had been hard-pressed to sustain driving researchers to pay for their own research, or participate in exploitative international collaborations driven by funders' objectives.

The situation is worsened by low salaries for academics. Even top-earning academics for instance, in South Africa, earn an average of 53% (in a range of 45% to 60%) of what their counterparts earn in high-income countries like the USA, and even lower when compared with Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Article processing charges range from US\$1,250 to US\$2,225, the researchers say, but for top journals the fee can rise to US\$5,000. If a journal asks for US\$2,500, that can translate to losing an entire salary for six months before tax. Even a 50% waiver may still mean a one to three months' salary loss. Researchers say it results in few publications by Africans in high impact journals and drives researchers to publish in dodgy and poor quality journals that charge less.

The researchers recommended fair and equitable opportunities for African researchers, including those from low-income countries, where governments, funders and donors should strengthen local research governance.

Competitive publishing limits waivers

"The fee, discount and waiver policies of open access scientific publishers need to incorporate considerations of capacity to pay. It is not fair to impose flat fees, or discount and waiver conditions," they

said.

African journals should aspire to be like those high-impact open access journals based in London, Boston or Geneva, with a global reach, further setting their own fees, discount and waiver policies, they noted.

Marincola suggested moving away from the current system of article processing charges and stressed the necessity to request waivers. Publishing is a very competitive business and publishers find that they are financially unable to be as generous with their waiver policies as they once were.

Ideally, central funders such as national grant agencies like the National Institute of Health (NIH) or foundations will support article processing charges across the scientific landscape so researchers need not find themselves in the position of having to scramble for funding, she said.

“Even with the best intentions, the costs of publishing, review, editing [among other requirements], are considerable so it’s not financially viable to depend on publisher-by-publisher ability to waive article processing charges for African researchers or others,” Marincola said.

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