

Some Personal Reflections on Enhancing Global North – Global South Academic Cooperation in Legal Higher Education in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

This paper provides some personal reflections on my experiences as a project leader in four cooperative projects with colleagues from the Global South involving higher education institutions (HEIs) in seven countries—namely, Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia, Colombia, Palestine, Bulgaria, and Kosovo. The aim is to try to assess advantages and shortcomings of some of these funding programs in terms of their framing, structuring, and (limited) funding, and to provide some suggestions for ensuring better coordination of what constitutes an institutionally fragmented field. The focus of my reflections is on three related broad themes—that is, how to enhance international academic cooperation, improve academic mobility, and ensure better access to teaching and research materials for Global South HEIs. The paper first analyzes the issue of funding for North–South cooperation, then moves on to the enhancement of international academic cooperation, international mobility, and finally, the provision of better access to teaching and research materials.

Keywords: Higher education cooperation, adequate funding, Global North, Global South, research and teaching, academic mobilities

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides some personal reflections on my experiences as a project leader for four cooperative projects with colleagues from the Global South involving higher education institutions (HEIs) in seven countries—namely, Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia, Colombia, Palestine, Bulgaria, and Kosovo. The aim is to try and assess the advantages and shortcomings of some of these funding programs in terms of their framing, structuring, and (limited) funding, and to provide some suggestions for ensuring better coordination of what constitutes an institutionally fragmented field. As a scholar working at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR or “Centre”), which has decades-old experience supporting various initiatives and projects in the field of human rights education,¹ these projects are embedded in a broader enabling environment.

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¹ See NCHR, “Human Rights Education,” accessed Oct. 20, 2024, <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/id/Education/indexny.html>.

The Centre's International Department has worked on human rights education in several countries, trying to enable State actors, academia, and civil society to promote human rights in line with the main United Nations (UN) human rights treaties. It has worked with partners in Asia since the 1990s, and in recent years, it has strengthened its cooperation with Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, supporting and facilitating human rights research and education at the university level and in research centers. Among its activities, the NCHR has supported academics, researchers, and students in their efforts to access knowledge and resources on human rights, and it has organized training on topics such as business and human rights, gender equality and women's rights, UN human rights mechanisms, and human rights and peace studies² more generally. The Centre has also encouraged and supported students from partner countries to earn master's degrees in human rights at the NCHR, and it has invited academics from partner universities to carry out short research visits. Each year, the Centre's International Department also offers a fully funded two-to-three-week visiting program (research grant) for three guest researchers. The grant is available for researchers focusing on human rights within the disciplines of law, the humanities, and social sciences.

The four projects I have led have been funded respectively under Erasmus+ Global Mobility; Norway Grants; the Utforsk/Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills; and Norhed II/Norad. I use the term Global South loosely, as Bulgaria and Kosovo—the first being a European Union (EU) member State, and the other a potential EU candidate for membership—would not qualify. Still, these two countries could be considered developing countries in southeastern Europe.³ Since 1979, the University of Oslo (UiO) has had a North-South Committee whose function is to provide strategic advice to the university leadership and be involved in the quality assurance of UiO's participation in Norwegian programs for North-South cooperation.⁴ The content and extent of utilization of that advice is not public.

The focus of my reflections is on three related broad themes—that is, how to enhance international academic cooperation, improve academic mobility, and ensure better access to teaching and research materials for Global South HEIs. Academic cooperation and mobility across borders are very important for HEIs, both in furthering the internationalization of education and attracting necessary external funding. Funding and programs aimed at facilitating such cross-border cooperation and mobility need adequate attention and support from States and international organizations. Science-based solutions to various global challenges, ranging from climate change to sustainable development, to pandemics, social inequalities, and violent conflicts, can be found by working together across borders and continents as partners. While there is significant lip service given to North-South academic cooperation, institutional and other bottlenecks can undermine such cooperation. The paper first analyzes the issue of funding for North-South cooperation, then moves on to the enhancement of international academic cooperation, international mobility, and finally, the provision of better access to teaching and research materials. The analysis generally follows a strengths-weaknesses-potential solutions cycle.

PROJECTS AND FUNDING: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Funding for furthering North-South HEIs' cooperation is available from national agencies that fall broadly under three general categories: national research councils, ministries of education, and national development agencies. At the regional level, the European Research Council (ERC), set up by the European Union (EU) in 2007, is the main European funding organization, funding researchers to run projects based across Europe.⁵ Among others, the ERC has the Twinning portfolio whose aim is to strengthen academic collaboration by linking at least two research institutions from two different EU member States or associated countries.⁶ In Norway, funding is

² See generally Maria D. Sommardahl, "Education for Peace: Epilogue," in *Promoting Peace Through International Law*, eds. Cecilia Marcela Bailliet and Kjetil Mujezinović Larsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 416–29.

³ For a classification of developed and developing countries, see UNCTAD, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Classifications.html>. The Global North broadly comprises North America and Europe, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand per UNCTAD.

⁴ For more information, see "The North-South Committee," <https://www.uio.no/english/about/global/countries/global-south/the-north-south-committee.html>.

⁵ See European Research Council, "For Non-European Researchers," <https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/non-european-researchers>. Researchers from anywhere in the world can apply for ERC grants provided the research they undertake will be carried out in an EU member State or associated country.

⁶ European Research Council, "Twinning," accessed Oct. 20, 2024, https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/twinning_en.

spread across various agencies, including the Norwegian Research Council,⁷ the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (related to the Ministry of Education and Research),⁸ and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹ These funding opportunities cover various types of cooperation, combining teaching, research, and the mobility of academic staff and students. While a certain amount of funding is available, those interested in pursuing international academic cooperation need to know where to look for these opportunities, with the Norwegian government establishing a list of priority countries covered by such cooperation.¹⁰ The fragmentation of funding among several independent public agencies creates additional difficulties in accessing information for those interested, as well as potential portfolio overlaps among these agencies themselves.

The 2022 Panorama Strategy (2021–27),¹¹ which serves as a policy foundation for Norwegian international cooperation in research, higher education, and innovation, includes nine strategic countries outside of Europe—namely, Canada, China, Brazil, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States (US).¹² The selected countries are all major players; missing from the list are many countries from the Global South that could actually benefit from academic cooperation and support from Norway to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education.¹³ The Norwegian government has issued its ten-year, long-term research and higher education plan for 2023–32.¹⁴ According to a September 2022 white paper, research and higher education have both become international activities, and more use should be made of the opportunities for international cooperation, whether through European or Nordic fora, bilateral collaboration, or under the auspices of international organizations such as the UN or OECD.¹⁵ In Norway, this international cooperation is fostered in various forms and through different calls for project proposals. For example, the Norglobal call from the Norwegian Research Council includes a demand for an equal partner from a lower- to middle-income country.¹⁶ That said, most funding sources and cooperation for Norwegian HEIs occur within the European Economic Area (EEA)/EU framework and the European Research Council and are carried out with HEIs based in European countries.

Pursuing international academic cooperation requires significant efforts on the part of concerned HEIs and project leaders. Moreover, there are certain dynamics and preferences that guide international cooperation, which are based on an unequal playing field due to access to funding, perceived institutional standing, and political priorities that make such cooperation skewed towards Global North HEIs.¹⁷ Several relevant factors, including that available

⁷ For the NRC research portfolios, see <https://www.forskingsradet.no/en/Portfolios>. Information on international funding through the NRC is available at <https://www.forskingsradet.no/en/apply-for-funding/international-funding>.

⁸ See “Programmes and grant schemes” at <https://hkdir.no/en/programmes-and-grant-schemes>.

⁹ Norad supports North-South-South university partnerships for projects on capacity development in higher education and research through Norhed II, <https://www.norad.no/en/front/funding/norhed>. It provided 264.2 million NOK for higher education in 2023; see <https://resultater.norad.no/sector/education/post-secondary-education/higher-education>.

¹⁰ See “Guidelines and tools for responsible international knowledge cooperation” at <https://hkdir.no/en/guidelines-and-tools-for-responsible-international-knowledge-cooperation>.

¹¹ For more information on this strategy and previous ones, see “The Panorama Strategy (2021–2027),” at <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-panorama-strategy-20212027/id2845286>.

¹² See Hege Toje, “Navigating New Realities in International Academic Collaboration,” Nov. 21, 2023, <https://www.eaie.org/resource/norway-guidelines-cooperation.html>.

¹³ See, especially, targets and indicators 4.3, 4.7, and 4.c at https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators.

¹⁴ Norwegian Government White Paper, Meld. St. 5 (2022–2023), “Long-term plan for research and higher education 2023–2032,” <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-5-20222023/id2931400/> (Long-term plan 2023–2032). The white paper notes that it has long been a political goal for R&D investment to equal 3% of GDP and for the public sector to cover 1%, while business and industry should cover 2% (p. 15).

¹⁵ Long-term plan 2023–2032, p. 14.

¹⁶ See, more generally, The Research Council of Norway, “Portfolio plan Global Development and International Relations,” Oct. 20, 2022, <https://www.forskingsradet.no/en/Portfolios/Global-development-international-relations/portfolio-plan-global-development-and-international-relations/outlook>.

¹⁷ See, among others, Savo Heleta and Divinia Jithoo, “International research collaboration between South Africa and rest of the world: An analysis of 2012–2021 trends,” *Transformation in Higher Education* 8 (2023): a246, <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v8i0.246>. This research has found that while the past decade has seen a growth in research collaboration with Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Nigeria, South African universities continue to be largely Eurocentric and prioritize collaboration with the Global North while sidelining research collaboration with the African continent and Global South. See also Abla M. Sibai et al., “North-South inequities in research collaboration in humanitarian and conflict contexts,” *The Lancet* 394, no. 10209 (2019): 1597–1600 (North-South inequities in research collaboration).

funding might fall under the normal payment rates for Norwegian academic staff, stipends, and daily costs; the significant administrative support required to run such projects and report to the funder; the granting of limited or no institutional overhead; and the formal requirement of making a financial or in-kind contribution for some programs, causes these projects not to be economically sustainable or profitable enough and hence not so desirable or even affordable for most Norwegian HEIs. Significant administrative capacity for partner institutions, especially for those scholars leading the projects, is crucial because follow-up on activities and reporting requirements are substantive. Hence, these projects are more difficult to run, both academically and administratively, and often there is less money to cover these expenses.

This circumstance often results in the pursuit of such international academic cooperation with Global South partners subject to the initiatives of a limited number of persons who are keen to pursue such cooperation because of their research interests, ethnic background, mere idealism, or other connections to a specific country. Moreover, in the post-COVID-19 era, prices for travel and accommodation have increased substantially; national currencies fluctuate considerably both in Norway and in the Global South partner countries; and the stipends and financial compensation allocated under various mobility schemes are not entirely adequate for covering expenses for projects that usually last four to six years despite adjustment efforts. Preferences for international academic cooperation are quite heavily tilted towards well-established and generally well-funded Global North universities. Usually, these HEIs receive the lion's share in project funding competitions. There is a core-periphery dynamic among and within North-South countries when it comes to the standing of HEIs and their ability to generate funding through international academic cooperation, which global rankings and other metrics (not always transparent) have further exacerbated.

How can we ensure meaningful international academic cooperation between Global North-Global South HEIs?¹⁸ First, and on a more general level, Global South HEIs cannot be token partners because there is a requirement for their inclusion under a specific program or simply because they are cheaper budget-wise. Second, the intellectual contribution of scholars from the Global South needs to be adequately included and reflected in the outputs of the project.¹⁹ This ensures that their voices and perspectives become part of the broader academic exchange, preferably through open-access publications. Third, and equally important, there needs to be specifically allocated national and, if possible, regional funding to pursue international academic cooperation with the Global South. At a time when national budgets are strained and populism is on the rise around the world, including in the Global North, and where there is a need to improve public infrastructure and provide better safety nets at home for vulnerable groups, it is not easy to argue for increasing budgets or making funding available for international academic cooperation. Still, for the organized international community to rise to the global challenges it faces and to ensure sustainable development and a more peaceful world, international academic cooperation and jointly developed science-based approaches are necessary. Preferably, such funding should be allocated separately and alongside development aid. However, if that funding was part of development aid, and every developed country contributed 1% of its GDP to that aid, and 0.05–0.1% of that contribution was earmarked to further international academic cooperation (R&D), this would still be a good start to build upon, with additional contributions preferably coming from the private sector.

ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC COOPERATION

The dual rights to education and the enjoyment of the benefits of science are an important part of international human rights law.²⁰ Various international human rights treaty norms and the practice of UN human rights bodies,²¹ including articles 13 and 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2019 Global

¹⁸ See, among others, Fernanda Leal, Kyria Finardi, and Julieta Abba, "Challenges for an internationalization of higher education from and for the global south," *Perspectives in Education* 40, no. 3 (2022): 241–50.

¹⁹ See, among others, "North-South inequities in research collaboration," especially p. 1598 (n 17).

²⁰ For more information, see UNESCO, "The right to education," accessed Oct. 20, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education>.

²¹ These would include both the practice of UN human rights treaty bodies as well as the Special Procedures, especially the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education. For more information on these mechanisms, see, respectively, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-education>.

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education, codify and develop the details of these fundamental rights.²² Despite UNESCO's efforts and the 2019 convention, the recognition of higher education diplomas and study credits across borders remains a challenge.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ("CESCR Committee") has adopted a couple of relevant General Comments on the rights to education and enjoyment of scientific benefits, clarifying relevant State obligations.²³ Thus, in General Comment no. 25 (2020), the CESCR Committee dedicated a whole section to international cooperation (section VI), noting among others that as certain fields of science necessitate universal endeavor, international cooperation among scientists should be encouraged to foster scientific progress;²⁴ developed States should contribute to the development of science and technology in developing countries, adopting measures to achieve this purpose, such as allocating development aid and funding towards building and improving scientific education, research, and training in developing countries, promoting collaboration between scientific communities of developed and developing countries to meet the needs of all countries, and facilitating their progress while respecting national regulations;²⁵ benefits and applications resulting from scientific progress should be shared, with due incentives and regulations, with the international community — particularly developing countries;²⁶ and bilateral and multilateral agreements should enable developing countries to build their capacity to participate in generating and sharing scientific knowledge and benefiting from its applications.²⁷ Investing in higher education is necessary for a country's sustainable development, for meeting the educational needs of young people, and for taking part in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy.²⁸ International cooperation is important for resolving common global challenges, including countering climate change, ensuring human rights protection, transitioning to a renewable green energy economy, and developing peaceful and resilient societies.²⁹ Higher education and research are important components for the sustainable development of each country and are reflected in SDG 4. However, there are already problems with sharing the benefits of scientific progress.³⁰ These problems have been abundantly demonstrated by the HIV epidemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the overall concentration of technology and technological development in a few industrialized countries. Most developing countries struggle to gain access to this knowledge, technology, and their benefits. With geopolitical competition spilling from military and economic domains into other areas, and the creeping securitization of international academic cooperation, the latter is prone to worsening not only in engineering and technology-sensitive areas but also in the humanities.

Building Human Rights Education and Research

While all four projects I have led include elements of building human rights education and research, I will primarily draw on only one of them—specifically, human rights education in Bulgaria. The first cooperative project with the New Bulgarian University (NBU) was funded under a Norway Grants project (EEA and Norway Grants)³¹

²² See the preamble and art. 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; art. 13 ICESCR; art. 10 CEDAW; and arts. 28 and 29 CRC. See also the 2019 Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, <https://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/global-convention>, and the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-against-discrimination-education>.

²³ CESCR Committee, General Comment no. 13 (Twenty-first session, 1999): The right to education (art. 13 of the Covenant); General Comment no. 25 (2020) on science and economic, social and cultural rights (art. 15(1)(b), (2), (3), and (4) of the ICESCR).

²⁴ General Comment no. 25 (2020), para. 78.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 83.

²⁸ See Norad, "Higher Education," accessed Oct. 20, 2024, <https://www.norad.no/en/front/thematic-areas/higher-education-and-research/higher-education>.

²⁹ See also CESCR Committee, General Comment no. 25 (2020), para. 81 (n 23).

³⁰ See, among others, General Comment no. 25 (2020) on art. 15: science and economic, social and cultural rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-25-2020-article-15-science-and>.

³¹ The EEA and Norway Grants are Norway's contribution to reducing social and economic disparities in Europe. The funds are used to finance projects in fields and sectors such as the environment, climate, health, education, research, and innovation. For more information, see <https://eeagrants.org>. There are fifteen European countries that can benefit from this program. For the relevant topics covered, see "Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness," <https://eeagrants.org/topics-programmes/innovation-research-education-and-competitiveness>.

and was coordinated by the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice. The project introduced a compulsory human rights course in law faculties in Bulgaria, several model curricula at the bachelor's and master's levels, a PhD program in human rights, and training for several teachers in human rights education at the university level.³² Most of the activities took place during the 2021–24 period.

First, we performed a joint assessment of the situation of human rights education in Bulgaria, examining existing courses, teaching materials, human resources, and the general willingness to adopt, teach, or take a course on human rights. Then, we carried out vertical and horizontal integrations of human rights into the curricula by putting together several sample courses on human rights, as well as including human rights aspects in existing core law courses such as constitutional law, administrative law, criminal law, and so on. We also prepared a PhD program on human rights law that included five core courses, covering the theory and methodology of human rights law, international and European human rights law, public law, private law, and criminal law. Finally, we offered several training sessions for Bulgarian colleagues who came to Oslo to audit our master's courses on human rights and receive training on various forms of teaching and assessment. Concurrently, in January 2024, the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights prepared and delivered training courses in Sofia, Bulgaria, on various types of teaching, including experiential legal learning; student assessments; and specific human rights courses. The subject of human rights has been introduced as an obligatory course in nine law faculties in Bulgaria, and the expectation is that the jointly developed PhD program in human rights hosted by the NBU, the first of its kind in Bulgaria and perhaps more broadly, will be approved in late 2024 by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education.

Improving International Academic Mobility

The mobility of scholars and students is supported under various programs, including Erasmus+ Global Mobility,³³ which is an academic mobility enhancement program in Europe. I have three experiences to share here—namely, an Erasmus+ Global Mobility project with Kosovo;³⁴ an Utforsk project with South Africa;³⁵ and a Norhed II project with five partner institutions in the Global South, respectively, in Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia, Colombia, and Palestine.³⁶ The first two projects also included the mobility of (master's) students, whereas the last supported the mobility of junior academic staff, with “junior” including all academic ranks below Professor.

Experiences with Erasmus+ Global Mobility

The Erasmus+ Global Mobility experience with the Faculty of Law of the University of Prishtina (Kosovo) involved student and academic staff mobility over a three-year period, August 2020–July 2023. The aim was to join scholarly and pedagogical expertise to advance research-based teaching in the fields of human rights, transitional justice, democracy, and the rule of law and to foster student and staff mobility between our respective institutions. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project had to be completed in half the time—namely, in one-and-a-half years instead of three. Despite travel restrictions and visa requirements, during the Spring Semester 2022–Spring Semester 2023 period, we still managed to carry out about 75% of the planned mobilities—that is, twenty-six out of thirty-five.³⁷ The project included student mobilities and academic staff mobilities for research and teaching.

³² See “Building the capacity of Bulgarian universities in human rights legal education,” https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/projects/ecthr_bulgaria_ministry_of_justice/index.html.

³³ For the eligible countries, see <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>.

³⁴ For my own project, see <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/projects/erasmus-global-mobility>.

³⁵ For my own project, called “Fostering research-based education through academic mobility and measuring the domestic impact of core human rights treaties,” see https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/projects/diku_utforsk_pretoria/index.html.

³⁶ For my own Norhed II project, called “Partnership for Peace: Better Higher Education for Resilient Societies,” see <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/projects/partnership-for-peace/index.html>.

³⁷ We had thirteen students and nine academic staff on exchange from Prishtina, and one student and three academic staff on exchange from Oslo, for a total of twenty-six mobilities out of thirty-five planned. We implemented four teaching mobilities, two incoming and two outgoing, from a total of eight teaching mobilities planned. Teaching mobilities proved more difficult to implement due to the fact that the teaching schedule and classes are fixed a semester in advance and are not easy to change. We implemented seven research stays in Oslo from UP colleagues and one research stay in Prishtina from the NCHR, for a total of eight research mobilities from ten planned.

Importantly, several PhD candidates from the University of Prishtina had two- to four-week-long research stays in Oslo during which they were able to gather materials from the UiO library and present their preliminary findings at the Centre. Teaching on various human rights and transitional justice issues took place both in Oslo and in Prishtina. We organized one final workshop on June 14, 2023, entitled “Transitional Justice in Kosovo: Taking Stock of Its Trajectory in the Period 1999–2023,” as a main concluding event. Three academic staff members from the University of Prishtina presented their topical research on transitional justice in Kosovo. As project leader, I presented some of the project’s main results.³⁸ One of the problems we encountered concerning the mobility of incoming academic staff was the centralization of the services at the university level, which required a lot of extra coordination and reminders to prepare the necessary paperwork. Changing schedules of academic staff at short notice also added to the difficulties and, in a couple of cases, ultimately resulted in the planned mobility not being implemented. Another significant problem was that visiting scholars from Prishtina had to cover their expenses for travel, accommodation, and living in Oslo for up to one month before being reimbursed upon return. The mobility of students proceeded much more easily than that of the academic staff because of fixed deadlines and extensive experience with such exchange programs, both at the University of Oslo and the University of Prishtina.

Experiences with the Utforsk project

This project type combines teaching and research components with academic mobility. Hence, it is well suited for advancing international cooperation but, as noted earlier, with a limited number of countries that can be considered part of the Global South.³⁹ The research component of this project has focused on the domestic impact of international human rights instruments and mechanisms. The teaching component has consisted of improving two courses—namely, those on human rights methodology and business and human rights. And the academic mobility component has consisted of implementing five mobilities for master’s students and three mobilities for PhD candidates for each partner institution, most of which have taken place. A few academic mobility opportunities for senior staff have also been included.

In terms of research cooperation, we have jointly organized an annual workshop (four times) on the domestic impact of human rights, with each partner hosting the workshop twice in a hybrid format; the project will end in the summer of 2025 with a large international conference resulting in a publication. During the four workshops, master’s students and PhD candidates from both institutions have been able to share their research and receive feedback. In terms of academic mobility, five master’s students from Pretoria (South Africa) have spent a full semester in Oslo, taking various courses while writing their master’s theses, a program that was co-supervised by a main supervisor from Pretoria and a co-supervisor from Oslo. Three PhD candidates from the Centre for Human Rights (CHR) at the University of Pretoria have been able to make good progress with their PhD research projects while on a three-month research stay in Oslo. They were able to discuss their methodology and preliminary research results with academic staff and present their PhD research projects at the Centre. Three PhD candidates from UiO have been able to benefit from a research stay at the CHR in Pretoria and discussing various aspects of their research with academic staff at the CHR, making good progress with their doctoral projects. The selection of the master’s students and academic staff for the mobilities has been done on a competitive basis, taking into account gender equality considerations. In terms of teaching cooperation, we have discussed our respective master’s program setups and the content and structure of the two selected courses.

The academic cooperation has run smoothly overall, but here we have also encountered some practical problems with payments because of banking requirements and South African mobile numbers not working properly in Norway and, in one case, a considerable delay in releasing a stipend to a PhD candidate from the CHR. We have also discovered that certain technological advances (such as two-step verification) and Norway being largely a cashless society are not necessarily advantages when cooperating with HEIs from the Global South.

³⁸ More information on this workshop held in Oslo is available at <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/current/events/2023/transitional-justice-workshop.html>.

³⁹ Utforsk is a measure under the Panorama Strategy (2021–27), targeting cooperation on higher education and research with Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. For more information, see <https://hkdir.no/en/programmes-and-grant-schemes/utforsk>.

Experiences with the Norhed II project (2021–26)

This project focuses on the professional training of young researchers (PhD candidates and junior faculty staff) with five Global South partners in Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia, Colombia, and Palestine. The network-based cooperation consists of four main components:

- a. developing and strengthening the academic quality of existing PhD education in the partner institutions;
- b. planning and organizing four PhD/academic staff training courses per year;
- c. enabling academic staff exchanges and sharing good practices (South-North and South-South); and
- d. organizing joint academic activities to foster joint research projects and publications.

During the 2021–24 period, fourteen PhD courses were organized, with a total of twenty-two PhD courses planned over six years. Five of the PhD courses will be organized by our Global South partner institutions, with each holding their course during a jointly agreed-upon year. This collaboration has created a good pool of relevant PhD courses on human rights and on peace and conflict studies, which can help partner institutions either establish their own PhD programs or revise and adopt new courses as necessary. There is a strong gender equality component in the PhD courses in terms of topics, teachers, and participants.

The three annual mobilities to Oslo and the ten South-South annual mobilities (2022–24) have allowed colleagues to explore other educational institutions and grow their professional networks. This has been particularly useful for colleagues from Mekelle University in Ethiopia who experienced the terrible effects of civil war from November 2020 to November 2022, during which Mekelle was under siege and isolated from the outside world. Mekelle University only started to participate in 2023, allowing it to re-engage with international partners. Our Birzeit University partners in the West Bank had been subject to various restrictions by Israeli authorities before October 2023⁴⁰ but experienced an even stronger clampdown by Israeli authorities after October 2023. Problems encountered in the Birzeit educational activities part of the project have related to visas, where Israeli authorities did not approve any for African participants in a PhD course organized by Birzeit University in May 2023. A researcher from a partner university had to be extricated from the West Bank in late October 2023 due to the security situation, and most likely none will be able to visit Birzeit for the remainder of the project. Also, the centralization of visa services for some countries has entailed extra travel and expenses, especially in Benin. More generally, our partners in Palestine and Ethiopia have encountered significant difficulties concerning visas and travel. In Palestine, the visa office in Ramallah closed down, so Palestinian scholars must travel to Amman (Jordan) to get their visas. In Ethiopia, our partners from Mekelle must travel to Addis Ababa. While before the war it was possible to do so by bus, this is no longer safe, and they must fly there. Difficulties in getting multiple entry visas for Ethiopian scholars due to restrictions in accessing the Schengen area create further complications and extra expenses. Other factors that put a financial strain on the project are currency fluctuations and increased prices for accommodation and living expenses during the mobilities and the PhD courses. Reporting requirements to the funding institutions are considerable, and significant administrative support is necessary to comply with them.

ENSURING BETTER ACCESS TO TEACHING AND RESEARCH MATERIALS

One of the major problems for high-quality education and research is access to relevant teaching materials and literature. Such access to scholarly materials has been centralized by some publishers and providers in the Global North, and access to those teaching and research materials is quite expensive, even for Global North HEIs themselves. It is no secret that much of the editing and proofreading of scholarly materials and publications is done for free by scholars and relevant university services, whereas access to those materials has significant costs, which are often prohibitive for our Global South partners. The open-access movement has made some gains in ensuring

⁴⁰ See Scholars at Risk, “Free to Think (Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project),” 2023 Report, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2023>. See also “Free to Think 2024,” at <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2024>. Among others, the 2024 report notes that on September 24, 2023, dozens of Israeli special forces forcibly entered Birzeit University, damaged campus property, and arrested eight students. Further, on November 8, 2023, Israeli forces damaged university infrastructure at Birzeit University when they stormed and raided the institution.

more scholarly work is publicly available.⁴¹ The Norwegian Research Council requires full and immediate open access to all scientific publications related to the projects it funds.⁴² The articles should be made available without delay (i.e., without an embargo) with an open license allowing reuse of the publication.⁴³ The requirements apply to projects with funding, beginning with calls for proposals in 2021. Similar open-access requirements are also valid for the ERC.⁴⁴ That said, those who want to publish their work open access with renowned academic publishers need to pay for it, which can be rather costly. This creates another major obstacle for Global South partners, from research being generally hard to access to research also being hard to publish in the required open-access format.

These international cooperation projects have provided a good foundation for ensuring better access to teaching and research materials, sharing good teaching practices, and discussing research ideas, especially when visits are somewhat longer, between one and three months, which allows enough time for research, presentations of works in progress, and networking events. With a plethora of teaching materials in English on human rights and other related subjects, it is interesting to discuss textbook choices with colleagues from the Global South. At the same time, it is important to support initiatives to develop teaching materials in the local languages. In such instances, relevant themes for discussion include the overall structure and which human rights issues should be included in textbooks in local languages. The Centre's International Department has supported the writing and translation of textbooks and other scholarly publications to make publications on human rights more universally available.

Some of the best results from these four projects involve getting young scholars from the Global South to Oslo and enabling them to make progress with their PhD research projects or master's studies and to participate in various academic activities organized by the Centre. Several early-career researchers who have come to Oslo through the Utforsk, Norhed II, or Erasmus+ Global mobility have made significant progress with their PhD research projects or other scholarly publications by collecting materials, presenting their research, receiving feedback on the substance and methodology of their research, and networking. The same goes for outgoing scholars from UiO to Prishtina or Pretoria.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

International academic cooperation has never been easy. However, three factors can further exacerbate inequalities and hinder sustainable international academic cooperation—namely, inadequate and fragmented funding, unequal technological developments and related barriers, and the explicit and implicit securitization of education and research. *First*, funding for international cooperation is not easy to procure, and it is not distributed fairly or equally among and within countries. There are universities in the Global South that can attract cooperation and obtain funding, whereas others are less successful in this regard due to core-periphery and other dynamics. These disparities are present not only among countries but also within them. While some universities are central to a particular State in terms of training most of its workforce, if funding is only distributed to a few of them, many communities outside large urban centers will not be adequately served.

Second, new technological developments are not the promised breakthrough we expected and needed, as they can exacerbate inequalities and create distance among HEIs. There is a plethora of digital educational infrastructure that we use to varying degrees, ranging from teleconferencing to digital classroom environments and participatory online research projects. While teleconferencing programs like Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, and many others have managed to bring researchers and educators from all over the world closer together, disparities in access to these platforms, as well as to broadband and the internet, remain, influencing some scholars' ability to effectively participate in academic activities that rely on these platforms. Moreover, near-monopolies on educational infrastructure, ranging from email services to cloud-storage services, to scholarly publication channels, library databases, and so on, risk perpetuating the inequalities that exist between educational institutions in the Global North

⁴¹ See, among others, EU Open Science at https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/our-digital-future/open-science_en. See also Norway, "Open access to publications," at <https://www.forskningradet.no/en/research-policy-strategy/open-science/publications>.

⁴² The Research Council of Norway, "Open access to publications," <https://www.forskningradet.no/en/research-policy-strategy/open-science/publications/>.

⁴³ See "Guidelines for researchers for open access publication," at <https://www.forskningradet.no/en/research-policy-strategy/open-science/publications/#guidelines>.

⁴⁴ See ERC, Open Science, at <https://erc.europa.eu/manage-your-project/open-science>.

and Global South. Lack of access to this technology and two-step authentication requirements create further obstacles to academic mobility. The latest artificial intelligence (AI) developments promise to usher in a revolution in how education will be perceived and implemented, with individualized programs for each student. However, whether and to what extent AI will similarly benefit Global South HEIs remains to be seen. In the meantime, and more generally, while educational technology has improved certain aspects of scholarly work, the time required for academic staff to manage various programs/platforms for their teaching, research, reporting, and scholarship dissemination has increased considerably. Some of this technological development and change has occurred at the cost of the health and well-being of both students and academic staff.

Third, the creeping securitization of the education and research domains is a worrisome development. While this securitization has covered mainly the technological and engineering domains, there is an increasing risk of it extending to the humanities. Besides the securitization discourse, there is also the related phenomenon of the politicization of academia along political positions taken by specific countries or political blocs. While the latter has always been present to some extent, and despite the political aspects of academic work and positions, it should be possible to maintain the space to meet and debate these various perspectives across disciplines and countries.

We need funding specifically earmarked for international academic cooperation, and we need better access to it for more countries in the Global South and for HEIs that are located outside countries' capitals. While acknowledging the limitations concerning available funding and human and other resources at Norwegian HEIs, it is possible to do more with better organization and transparency with the means available. We need to make it easier for students and academic staff to move around, and we need better systems for visas, hosting arrangements, and other procedures and activities at HEIs that foster mobility. This requires, among others, ensuring a good degree of compatibility between Global North HEIs, often operating in high-tech environments, and Global South HEIs, where scholars for various reasons might not have easy access to banking services when abroad or more generally, and who would also be unable to cover significant expenses related to mobility programs upfront, especially when reimbursement for research stays at Global North HEIs happens upon return. With resilience and adaptability, an open mind, a strong sense of solidarity, and adequate funding and administrative support, international academic cooperation can be an important tool to fight societal divisions and misperceptions and ensure better and fairer HEIs and societies at home and abroad.