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CAREER NEWS | 22 April 2025

Exclusive: a *Nature* analysis signals the beginnings of a US science brain drain

A total of job views and application data suggests jobseekers are looking abroad as the Trump administration's cuts to science take hold.

By Laura Unger & Jack Lawrence

A March, scientists and their allies gathered to protest cuts to funding in Washington, DC. Credit: Robyn Stevens-Brody/Alex Cohen/Getty

Researchers in the United States are seeking career opportunities abroad as President Donald Trump's administration slashes science funding and workforce numbers, finds an analysis of Nature's jobs board data.

Data from the Nature Careers global science jobs platform show that US scientists submitted 32% more applications for jobs abroad between January and March 2025 than during the same period in 2024. At the same time, the number of US-based users browsing jobs abroad increased by 35%.

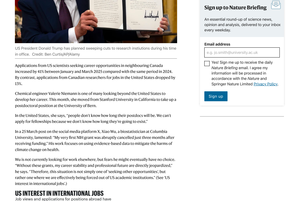
In March alone, as the administration intensified its cuts to science, views rose by 68% compared with the same month last year.

More than 200 federal grants for research related to HIV and AIDS were abruptly terminated last month. Cuts to grants from the US National Institutes of Health for COVID-19 research were revealed, and the government began a COVID rollback in research grants at Columbia University in New York City, because of campus protests supporting Palestinians in the conflict with Israel.

"To see this big drop in views and applications in the US – and the similar rise in those looking at jobs in Europe – is unprecedented," says Nature's Chris Pickard, who leads the Global Talent Solutions team at Springer Nature, which includes the Nature Careers multidisciplinary science jobs board. As this article went to press, the board hosted 90 live vacancies.

The team shared the data with Nature journalists on condition that its analysis was confined to percentage changes rather than raw numbers, on the grounds that the information is commercial commercially privileged. Nature's journalists are editorially independent of Springer Nature, its publisher.

The release of the Nature Careers jobs board data follows a separate poll of researchers by Nature's news team, which found that 75% of researchers in the United States who responded were looking at jobs.



US President Donald Trump has planned sweeping cuts to research institutions during his time in office. Credit: Kevin Dietsch/Getty

Applications from US scientists seeking career opportunities in neighbouring Canada increased by 45% between January and March 2025 compared with the same period in 2024. By contrast, applications from Canadian researchers for jobs in the United States dropped by 23%.

Chemical engineer Valeria Nicomano is one of many looking beyond the United States to develop her career. This month, she moved from Stanford University in California to take up a postdoctoral position at the University of Bern.

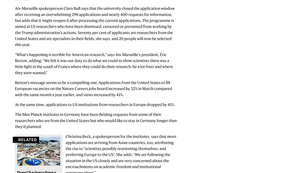
In the United States, she says, "people don't know how long their positions will be. We can't apply for fellowships because we don't know how long they're going to last."

In a 23 March post on the social media platform X, Xiao Wu, a biostatistician at Columbia University, lamented: "My very first NIH grant was abruptly cancelled after three months after receiving funding." His work focuses on using evidence-based data to mitigate the harms of climate change on health.

Wu is not currently looking for work elsewhere, but fears he might eventually have no choice. "Without these grants, my career stability and professional future are direly jeopardized," he says. "Therefore, this situation is not simply one of 'seeking other opportunities'; but rather one where we are effectively being forced out of US academic institutions." (See 'US interest in international jobs'.)

US interest in international jobs

Job views and applications for positions abroad have risen sharply since the Trump inauguration.



Bring me your huddled masses

Some European institutions are scrambling to attract what might be an exodus of scientific talent from the United States.

In early March, for example, Aix-Marseille University in France, launched the Safe Place for Science initiative. It has received €20 million (about US$27 million) from the university's budget to sponsor 15 researchers working on climate, health, the environment and social sciences.

Aix-Marseille spokesperson Claire Bull says that the university closed the application window after receiving an overwhelming 39% applications and nearly 600 requests for information, but adds that it might reopen it after processing the current applications. The programme is aimed at US researchers who have been dismissed, censored or prevented from working by the Trump administration's actions. Seventy per cent of applicants are researchers from the United States and the rest are scholars in their fields, she says, and 20 people will now be hired this year.

"What happening is terrible for American research," says Alex Mauroff's president, Eric Berton, adding: "We felt it was our duty to do what we can to show scientists there was a little light in the south of France where they could do their research, be a bar free and where they were wanted."

Berton's message seems to be a compelling one. Applications from the United States to BE European vacancies on the Nature Careers jobs board increased by 32% in March compared with the same month a year earlier, and views increased by 45%.

At the same time, applications to US institutions from researchers in Europe dropped by 45%.

The Max Planck Institutes in Germany have been fielding requests from some of their researchers who are from the United States but who would like to stay in Germany longer than they planned.

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Christina Beck, a spokesperson for the institutes, says that more applications are arriving from Asian countries, too, attributing this to "the perceived political instability and uncertainty that is prompting Europe to the US". She adds: "We are following the situation in the US closely and are very concerned about the circumstances on academic freedom and institutional autonomy there."

On 7 April, Patrick Cramer, president of the Max Planck Society in Munich, Germany, announced the formation of the Max Planck Transatlantic Program. The initiative sets out plans to create collaborative research centres with US-based institutions, as well as providing further postdoctoral training posts, and extra places for junior investigators at the society's 84 institutes. It will also offer director positions to some "outstanding investigators" who are no longer able to work in the United States.

The entire international jobs market has seen a spike in activity (see 'Lands of opportunity'). Views and applications for non-US jobs posted on the Nature Careers website by researchers outside the country were 15% higher in January to March 2025 than they were in the same period last year.

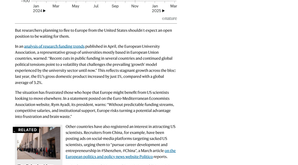
Lands of opportunity

Since the presidential election, applications from US researchers for positions abroad have spiked, whereas net international interest in the United States has fallen.

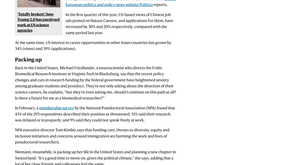
Interest in US jobs takes a dive

Europeans have stopped applying for US jobs

Chinese interest in US jobs has been dampened



US interest in Canadian institutes has peaked



But researchers planning to flee to Europe from the United States shouldn't expect an open position to be waiting for them.

In an analysis of research funding trends published in April, the European University Association, a representative group of universities mostly based in European Union countries, warned: "Recent cuts to public funding in several countries and continued global political tensions point to a volatility that challenges the prevailing 'growth' model of international research cooperation and now." This reflects stagnant growth across the bloc: last year, the EU's gross domestic product increased by just 1%, compared with a global average of 3.2%.

The situation has flummoxed those who hope that Europe might benefit from US researchers looking to move elsewhere. In a statement posted on the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association website, Boris Ayadi, its president, wrote: "Without predictable funding streams, competitive salaries, and institutional support, Europe risks turning a potential advantage into frustration and brain waste."

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Other countries have also registered an interest in attracting US scientists. Recruiters from China, for example, have been posting ads on social media platforms targeting sacked US scientists, urging them to "pursue career development and entrepreneurship in Yibaishuren, YiChina", a March article on the European politics and policy news website Politico reports.

In the first quarter of this year, US-based views of Chinese job ads increased by 150% on Nature Careers, and applications for them, have increased by 30% and 20% respectively, compared with the same period last year.

At the same time, US interest in career opportunities in other Asian countries has grown by 50% (views) and 39% (applications).

Packing up

Back in the United States, Michael Friedlander, a neuroscientist who directs the Frahm Biomedical Research Institute at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, says that the recent policy changes and cuts to research funding have "made me feel like I don't know the future of my profession anymore". As a tenured professor, he says he is not only asking about the direction of their science's careers, he explains, "but they're even asking me, should I continue on this path or shift to there a future for me as a biomedical researcher?"

In February, a questionnaire survey by the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) found that 43% of the 295 respondents described their position as pessimistic. 35% said their research was delayed or disrupted, and 9% said they could not speak freely at work.

NPA executive director Tom Kimbrough says that funding cuts, threats to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and concerns around immigration are harming the work and lives of postdoctoral researchers.

Nonetheless, meanwhile, is packing up her life in the United States and planning a new chapter in Switzerland. "It's a good time to move on, given the political climate," she says, adding that a lot of her close friends are considering the same.

doi: https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-01256-7

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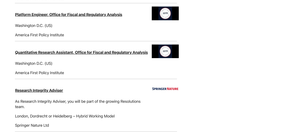

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Nature (Nature): ISSN 1476-4687 (online) ISSN 0028-0836 (print)

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