

# Open access to scholarly research

Elisa Mason

## Forced migration authors hold the key to enabling free and unfettered access to the full text of research articles.

Practitioners and policymakers have a wealth of research on forced migration at their disposal online: literature reviews, case studies, conference proceedings, working papers, government documents, policy briefs, unpublished reports, and much more. What they will not find in abundance – at least, not for free – are the final products of research, that is, articles published in scholarly journals. Price and permission barriers have effectively rendered research findings inaccessible to many of those who need them most.

Enter ‘open access’: digital online literature, free of charge and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions – in other words, without the price and permission barriers noted above.

Researchers can choose to publish in an open access journal; this mechanism does not charge readers or their institutions for access. The Directory of Open Access Journals currently indexes over 6,000 titles that are free, full-text, quality-controlled,

scientific and scholarly.<sup>1</sup> As of mid 2011, none of the existing established scholarly journals with an exclusive focus on forced migration is open access. However, in early 2011, the online *Journal of Internal Displacement* and student-edited *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* (OxMo) were both launched as open access.

Researchers who prefer to continue publishing with familiar journals in their field can opt for self-archiving. This involves depositing a copy of an article into an open access repository. There are two kinds of repositories: those that collect the research output of an individual institution and those that collect the research output on a certain subject area.<sup>2</sup> An author can either archive a ‘preprint’ (the version of an article that has been submitted to a journal for consideration) or a ‘postprint’ (the version of an article that has been accepted by a journal and has undergone peer review).

As regards copyright, most journal publishers already give permission to authors to archive their preprints and postprints (‘e-prints’).<sup>3</sup> If authors

do not self-archive, it is because they have not yet taken advantage of the opportunity to do so, rather than because of copyright restrictions.

By embracing open access and putting their research articles within the reach of those who will benefit from them the most, forced migration authors will achieve more impact. Their work will reach a wider and more diverse audience, and they will enjoy greater visibility, be cited more often and, most importantly, make a difference.

Elisa Mason (fminfotracker@gmail.com) is an information specialist who manages a blog, *Forced Migration Current Awareness*,<sup>4</sup> and a wiki, *Researching Forced Migration: A Guide to Reference and Information Sources*.<sup>5</sup>

A good starting point for authors and anyone else who wishes to know more about open access is the *Open Access Scholarly Information Sourcebook* (OASIS), online at [www.openoasis.org](http://www.openoasis.org).

1. Directory of Open Access Journals [www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org).

2. See Directory of Open Access Repositories (openDOAR) at [www.opendoar.org](http://www.opendoar.org).

3. See RoMEO database at [www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/](http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/) for information on publishers’ copyright policies regarding self-archiving.

4. <http://fm-cab.blogspot.com>

5. <http://forcedmigrationguide.pbworks.com>