

Call for Papers: Refugee Academics and their Networks

16 to 18 September 2026, Senate House, University of London

Proposals are invited for papers to be given at a conference on Refugee Academics organized by the Research Centre for German & Austrian Exile Studies, ILCS, London, and the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung, Germany.

Academics were among the first groups to be targeted by Nazi legislation. With the Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums (Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service) of 7 April 1933, university teachers who were unacceptable to the new Nazi government were dismissed from their posts, as were lawyers and medical practitioners employed by the state, some of whose work fell into the academic sector. All came under pressure to emigrate and faced the daunting prospect of starting afresh in a foreign land, among foreign colleagues and in a university system with which they were not familiar.

The forced flight of so many Jewish and left-wing academics was an irreparable loss to German and Austrian intellectual and cultural life, while other countries benefited correspondingly. The greatest benefit accrued to the United States, whose higher education establishments took in very large numbers of refugee scholars. Great Britain provided the principal organization that enabled academics to leave the Third Reich, by finding them funding and posts at universities in Britain, the United States and, in smaller numbers, other countries: this was the Academic Assistance Council, established in 1933 and renamed the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in 1936. The Rockefeller Foundation played an important role in this respect in the USA.

The impact of refugee academics on the universities and, more broadly, on the intellectual culture of their host societies was very considerable. It extended from areas in which Germany had traditionally been strong, such as classics, history, the natural sciences and of course German studies, to what had previously been minority subject areas of little interest: in Britain, the disciplines of art history and psychoanalysis had hardly existed before the arrival of the refugees. In America, new disciplines like sociology or social and economic history were galvanized by the influx of fresh ideas. Refugee archivists and librarians also contributed greatly to what had previously been considered merely as areas ancillary to academic research.

While large numbers of refugee academics found positions at universities in Britain and the United States, and while many rose to positions of great eminence, the cost of forced emigration to its victims was also very great. Many refugee academics failed entirely to obtain a position

commensurate with their abilities and expectations. For every Adorno who went on from Oxford to a stellar career in the USA and later in West Germany, there were others who were deprived of the careers to which their abilities would normally have entitled them and who were forced drastically to lower their professional expectations.

Consideration should also be given to the theoretical dimensions of the emigration of scholars and scholarship from Nazi Germany. To what extent did the arrival of the refugees impact on their host institutions and intellectual culture generally? To what extent did the refugees' entry into a different academic system give them access to new methodologies that broadened and enriched their research, opening up perspectives not available in their homelands? What cultural and intellectual capital did the refugees bring with them, and what use were they able to make of it in their countries of refuge? The potential for new, hybrid forms of scholarship conducted by liminal figures who found themselves on the fault line between two different academic cultures should also be explored. Importantly, the differing experiences of male and female academics in their countries of refuge is an under-researched area that needs to be addressed. Topics to be explored include:

- The conditions under which refugee academics arrived in the host countries
- Organisations, institutions and individuals who assisted refugee academics in emigrating and finding new posts
- Academics from Italy and other countries whose governments aligned their racial policies with those of Nazi Germany
- Refugee academics in specific subject areas
- Individual universities as host institutions to refugee academics
- What the refugees brought to their hosts, and what they gained from their hosts
- Cultural and intellectual transfer as a factor in the academic diaspora
- The career development of refugee academics in their countries of settlement

Papers considering networks will be given priority over biographical studies of individual refugees.

The conference will take place at Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU, on 16-18 September 2026. There will be a workshop for doctoral students on the morning of 16 September, a separate Call will follow. Abstracts of proposed papers, about 200 words in length, and a brief biography, of no more than 100 words, should be sent by **21 September 2025** to Dr Anthony Grenville (abgrenville@blueyonder.co.uk), Professor Andrea Hammel (anh17@aber.ac.uk) (also for the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung) and Dr Felicitas Starr-Egger (f.starr_egger@yahoo.com).