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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation
Subject:	Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation Position paper on the current COVID-19 outbreak and gendered impacts on researchers and teachers

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Delegations will find attached the "Position paper on the current COVID-19 outbreak and gendered impacts on researchers and teachers" of the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation.

## Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation

### Position paper on the current COVID-19 outbreak and gendered impacts on researchers and teachers<sup>1</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic. Since then governments across Europe have introduced unprecedented measures in order to help slow the spread of the virus. This has led to a new and unusual way of life for millions of Europeans, which includes social distancing, self-isolation, quarantining, working from home, home-schooling children, job losses and economic hardship, and, for some, the loss of family members and friends. **The COVID-19 outbreak is clearly taking a social, economic and psychological toll, and already there are the first indications of its intersectional gendered effects.** Some of these have been highlighted by organisations such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and Nesta, and will require further research:<sup>2</sup>

- While the infection rate is similar for men and women, men have a higher mortality rate for medical as well as social reasons.
- There is a possibility of severe job losses in women-dominated professions, such as tourism, retail, contract cleaning, hairdressing, etc.
- Unpaid care work will increase, with additional caring responsibilities likely to be taken on by women.
- Physical distancing is not an option for everyone, particularly nurses and professional carers (who are mainly female).
- There is an increased risk of domestic abuse, with women in violent relationships often socially isolating with their abuser.
- There are indications that a permanent increase in flexible and home working arrangements will affect women and men differently.

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission has published a ‘First “ERAvsCORONA” ACTION PLAN: short-term coordinated Research and Innovations actions’<sup>3</sup>, has established a dedicated online resource for EU supported research and innovation projects and initiatives to tackle the spread of coronavirus and preparedness for other outbreaks<sup>4</sup> and a case study on the impact of sex and gender in the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Research Funding Organisations as well as Research Performing Organisations in Member States have

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<sup>1</sup> This position paper has been drafted by the Gender and COVID-19 Task Force of SWG GRI, with Ross Woods as rapporteur and Tjasa Bericic, Jacqueline Grech, Jennifer Harper, Simona Isler, Marcela Linkova, Irene Rehmman, and Mijja Saari as members.

<sup>2</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/news/coronavirus-puts-women-frontline>  
<https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/there-will-be-no-back-normal/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/research\\_by\\_area/documents/ec\\_rtd\\_era-vs-corona\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/research_by_area/documents/ec_rtd_era-vs-corona_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/health-research-and-innovation/coronavirus-research-and-innovation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/health-research-and-innovation/coronavirus-research-and-innovation_en)

<sup>5</sup> [Oertelt-Prigione, Sabine](#). 2020. The impact of sex and gender in the COVID-19 pandemic. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4f419ffb-a0ca-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

launched similar initiatives and introduced policies to address the situation. Within this broader policy context there are opportunities for research on the COVID-19 pandemic, which specifically takes into account the gender dimension. Already, funding has been awarded for research in this area at European and national level. Much of this research focuses on scientific and medical research, yet there are other research areas that merit funding, particularly from a gender perspective.

### **The importance of women's participation in tackling COVID-19 in decision- and policy-making roles**

While women often make up the majority of frontline healthcare workers in fighting COVID-19, they are less involved in high-level decision-making processes. Women continue to be under-represented both in policymaking roles as well as leaders of research teams and in decision-making positions. **Ensuring that women are not excluded from the decision-making related to fighting COVID-19 in medical, societal, political or economic terms, will mean that women's needs during this pandemic are more likely to be met.** Additionally, it is essential that gender expertise is included in research on pandemic planning, outbreak response, and post-pandemic recovery, in order to ensure that societies are better equipped to tackle similar situations in the future.

### **Gendered effects of COVID-19 on research careers**

Initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender perspective reflect on the effects on society as a whole. However, female researchers are also at risk of being affected by the social restrictions being put in place by national governments. An immediate impact relates to working from home and additional caring and schooling responsibilities due to the closure of schools and childcare facilities. Currently, women assume the majority of unpaid caring responsibilities. **There is a significant risk that this inequality will be further reinforced due to the additional care and schooling work now being undertaken in households. The situation is exacerbated for single parents (mostly mothers) and also includes those who have the responsibility of caring for adults.**

Many female researchers are confronted with new circumstances of unpaid care and schooling responsibilities in addition to their academic work. The unequal distribution of such activities between men and women has already had consequences for the career paths of women in science. This connection will become more acute. Currently, women account for 24% of full professors across the EU28 and the research time lost as an impact of the current situation has the potential to further delay or make impossible career progression for female researchers. **First evidence is emerging that there is a gender gap in paper submission to scientific journals during the COVID-19 outbreak period, with women researchers submitting fewer papers than men or in instances where women's submission rates have remained the same compared to last year, men's have soared, especially with regard to solo-**

authored papers.<sup>6</sup>

**It is therefore crucial that research performing organisations, research funding organisations and other stakeholders continue to address the current situation and find a gender equitable way of doing so.** Universities as employers, as well as funding organisations, must provide additional financial contributions in an uncomplicated and flexible manner (e.g. extension of research projects or fixed-term employment contracts) in order to compensate for the loss of time caused by additional unpaid care and schooling work. Employers in the research sector are also responsible for the health protection of researchers with caring responsibilities who are battling excessive workloads, which can lead to working outside of normal hours (e.g. at night, weekends). Therefore, the time invested in care and schooling work must be recognised as working time in order to prevent excessive workloads and the health consequences thereof (such as e.g. burnout). In the medium and long term it will be important, that time invested in additional care and schooling work will not be regarded as active research time when applying for promotion or professorships.

Mobility is a vital part of research careers. Many researchers were surprised by the COVID-19 situation while based far from their home countries and families. Some of them had to break off their research stays at very short notice, while others are in a very vulnerable situation without a family and friendship network. It is important that the specific situation of mobile researchers is taken into account in all measures and that funds are available for unexpected additional costs (e.g. travel home).

### **The importance of Social Sciences and Humanities for managing the COVID-19 outbreak and its aftermath**

The COVID-19 outbreak has put into the spotlight the importance (and lengthy timelines) of medical research geared toward cures, as well as the wealth of creativity that has gone into technical solutions for protective gear, including masks, nanofilters, respirators, etc. Less attention has been paid in public discourse to **the social sciences and humanities**, although these are equally important for managing the current situation. Medical crises are not only technical challenges; they are not only about finding a vaccine and providing functional protective gear. They are equally about understanding **how people behave, adapt to and manage change, and whether and how they change their behaviours. They are also about psychological, sociological, legal and economic matters.** Issues that are at the heart of the current COVID-19 situation include understanding: how people cope with stress and exhaustion and which groups are under greater threat of falling into the high risk category; how family units operate under the shut-down; how solidarity ebbs and flows in society; which groups in society are worst affected either in terms of health outcomes or economic outcomes; how to ensure uptake of medical solutions by people; and how governance, democratic institutions, the

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<sup>6</sup> Flaherty, Colleen. 2020. No room of one's own. Inside Higher Ed. 21 April 2020, available at <https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity#.XqCIyP1kLnI.email>  
<https://www.thelily.com/women-academics-seem-to-be-submitting-fewer-papers-during-coronavirus-never-seen-anything-like-it-says-one-editor/>

rule of law and role of states may change.

### **Importance of gender-sensitive research for managing the COVID-19 outbreak and its aftermath**

**The outbreak makes equally visible the importance of gender research across the disciplines.** The virus affects men and women differently – in terms of health outcomes as well as in terms of the social and economic impact. Hence, **gender-responsive data and reliable conclusions should be the main pillar for confident policy decisions, coupled with an interdisciplinary approach, in order to better equip societies to tackle crisis such as the COVID-19 outbreak.**

It is important in this critical situation that researchers are following **principles and procedures where conclusions take into consideration the gender dimension.** Monitoring trends in the transmission of COVID-19 — and considering the underlying social norms affecting risk of exposure — is only possible if high-quality, disaggregated gender data is collected and made available. However, data collection should not be limited only to sex-disaggregated data. Biological explanations need to be integrated with other social factors which include the socioeconomic and political context. Collecting disaggregated data would allow both women's and men's socio-economic realities to be studied among the possible risk factors. The burden of the disease is not only gendered but rather intersects with other factors, such as age, health status, disability, occupation, socioeconomic status, migratory status and geographic location. **Special consideration should be given to how COVID-19 is intertwined with globalisation, capitalism, urbanisation, war, conflict, climate change, racism and xenophobia.**

**To respond properly to the pandemic, it is of great importance to highlight specific risks that various groups of women face because of inequalities rooted in gender roles.** Women make up 80 percent of hospital workers, including as the majority of professionals, technicians and labourers. Women are nearly 84 percent of the general medical practice workforce, again as the majority of professionals, but also as the majority of clerical and administrative staff. Furthermore, 77 percent of the pathology and diagnostic imaging workforce are women, and women make up 81.8 percent of residential care workers. Women are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their economic insecurity, over-representation in certain sectors of the economy, their unpaid caring responsibilities, and the feminisation of the education and healthcare sectors.

**Therefore, it is crucial that female staff are adequately protected and provided with decent working environments.** Unfortunately, policies and public health measures do not always address the position of women yet, as outlined above, the burden of the pandemic will largely be felt by women. Special protection measures are also required to respond to increased caregiving, violence and decreased access to sexual and reproductive health services considering how differently positioned women experience discrimination, domestic violence and access to health services and social supports. **Including gender-sensitive analysis and methods in the fields of technology, crisis economics, public health, engineering, and risk communications is crucial since they are all vital for building future resilience to the next**

emergency.

### Inspiring practices

In times of disruption from normal patterns of life such as the current pandemic and related lockdown, there is a heightened opportunity for making the transition to new innovative, sustainable ways of working and living. Indeed, **this may be the much-awaited time for reappraising outdated and inequitable structures and introducing much needed gender-balanced innovation.** It is important that at this time women are in a position to co-design innovative new governance structures in R&I and academia. The study of these structures needs to be given particular attention at the European level so that best practices can be identified and shared. In the area of research and innovation, good practice examples and potential benefits are already emerging. These include:

- Among national authorities, **the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation** has created a specific space related to COVID-19 in the Ministry website dedicated to resources with a gender perspective, including links to: reports of sex disaggregated data; scientific magazines with related publications; articles on the topic; and reports from relevant international stakeholders, such as EIGE, UN women or WEF. Additionally, the Ministry developed a campaign “scientificaddressingCOVID-19” to make visible women that are involved and/or leading scientific or innovation projects connected to the COVID-19 crisis. Lastly, the Gender Equality Unit of the Minister provides email information to all personnel, including RFOs and RPOs, on the impact of COVID-19 from a gender perspective, sharing reports from EIGE and the Spanish Women Institute, with a special focus on gender-based violence. The **Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family** established the Task Force “Donne per un nuovo Rinascimento” (Women for a new renaissance) to advise on scientific aspects and make proposals for the social, economic and cultural recovery post-COVID19.
- **Research Funding Organisations** across Europe as well as **the European Commission** extended deadlines in calls for proposals to ensure a level playing field for all applicants; the RFOs including the Commission have also launched new research programmes, funding COVID-19 related projects with a gender perspective.
- **Research Performing Organisations** such as **ETH Zurich** treating the additional time employees spend caring for children or relatives as normal working hours; multiple universities providing an allowance for staff working from home through special leave policies; others introducing additional rest days for their research and teaching staff; and still others introducing protections for casual and vulnerable staff where women tend to predominate. Additionally, some RPOs have paused all disciplinary processes and restructures (including redundancies).
- New opportunities for exploring **online meetings and conferences have been created, which** may address childcare issues that prevent researchers attending overseas conferences, while also reducing researchers’ carbon footprint and providing opportunities to researchers from low-income countries or without travel funds.

## Recommendations

Recalling the March call of *The Lancet* Gender and Covid-19 Working Group<sup>7</sup>, the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation CALLS ON:

1. The Commission, EU Member States and Associated Countries, Research Funding Organisation and Research Performing Organisations to consider the sex and gender effects of the COVID-19 outbreak in the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area as well as globally as part of its international cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation
2. The Commission, EU Member States and Associated Countries, Research Funding Organisations and Research Performing Organisations to consider the various ways the COVID-19 outbreak has affected the working conditions of researchers, teachers and students with potential gendered effects on research careers and career progression.

Specifically, the SWG GRI calls on **Research Funding Organisations** to:

3. Fund research into the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak and aftermath and require that any research into COVID-19 includes systematic collection, analysis and reporting of sex-disaggregated data and gendered impacts.
4. Tackle both medical and technological issues as well as social, psychological, economic and legal issues in publicly-funded research into COVID-19 outbreak and aftermath, and also support transdisciplinary research.
5. Take into account the time researchers spent performing primary care tasks during the COVID-19 outbreak and reflect the impact of this in the evaluation of research applications, in order to avoid exacerbating the parental wall that manifests in research careers.

The SWG GRI also calls on **Research Performing Organisations** to:

6. Take into account the time researchers spent performing primary care tasks during the COVID-19 outbreak and reflect the impact in promotion applications, in order to avoid exacerbating the parental wall that manifests in research careers.
7. Learn from the current situation and the abundance of practices introduced in Europe, and prepare relevant procedures and measures to be implemented in the event that a similar outbreak occurs in the future.

## Publishers

8. Publishers of scholarly papers are strongly encouraged to monitor and publish information on submission rates, peer review rates and other relevant metrics during and post-COVID-19 outbreak restrictions, segregated by sex.

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<sup>7</sup> The Working Group called "on governments and global health institutions to consider the sex and gender effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, both direct and indirect, and conduct an analysis of the gendered impacts of the multiple outbreaks, incorporating the voices of women on the front line of the response to COVID-19 and of those most affected by the disease within preparedness and response policies or practices going forward". For more see [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30526-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30526-2/fulltext)

The SWG GRI calls on relevant **Ministers in Member States and Associated Countries** to:

9. Ensure that budgetary commitments to gender equality objectives remain in place when planning responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of research and innovation.
10. Initiate a broad, action-based discourse around innovative learning and development platforms that will enable gender mainstreaming to have an impact in schools, universities and research institutions.



## **Further resources**

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/the-coronavirus-fallout-may-be-worse-for-women-than-men-heres-why/>

<https://www.scidev.net/global/gender/news/gender-blind-coronavirus-policies-could-hinder-disease-fight.html>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/3/news-womens-needs-and-leadership-in-covid-19-response>

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30526-2/fulltext?te=1&nl=in-her%20words&emc=edit\\_gn\\_20200312](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30526-2/fulltext?te=1&nl=in-her%20words&emc=edit_gn_20200312)

<https://eige.europa.eu/topics/health/covid-19-and-gender-equality>

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-gender-matters-impact-and-recovery-covid-19>

<https://data2x.org/an-intersectional-approach-to-a-pandemic-gender-data-disaggregation-and-covid-19/>

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-gender-matters-impact-and-recovery-covid-19>

<http://www.broadagenda.com.au/home/covid-19-is-not-gender-neutral/>

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/global-policy-institute/Policy-brief-COVID-19-and-intersectionality.pdf>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-ace2-men/men-have-high-levels-of-enzyme-key-to-covid-19-infection-study-finds-idUSKBN22M0UA>