

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Measures mitigating the effect of COVID-19

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As you may have learnt in the step-by-step guide, gender equality measures should always consider the **context of the organisation**. This also includes the evolving impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on practices and operations. Most human organisations, research organisations and research funding bodies have been severely affected by the health, economic and policy impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and are constantly adapting to the current situation. Initial feedback shows that the disruption to personal lives, education, working conditions and the economy stemming from the pandemic has had implications for gender equality and the implementation of gender equality plans (GEPs). Issues that have been noted include the following:

- a **deprioritisation of gender equality** objectives and measures during disruptions to education and research activities;
- an **unequal burden of additional family caring and education responsibilities** falling on women that, in turn, has undermined their own work, including research and publication;
- an **unequal burden of responsibility** falling on women to move delivery of teaching and pastoral support online;
- new ways of working**, including online management and collaboration, that require alertness to evolving patterns of inclusion and exclusion;
- differential impact on staff of **different seniority and contract types** with potential consequences for women who are over-represented in more precarious roles;
- the need to ensure that the **sex/gender dimension is integrated in COVID-19 research** in the context of a fast-paced, evolving and high-impact research environment.

Note that the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed a [web page](#) devoted to raising awareness on these and other challenges related to gender and COVID-19. The information made available draws on EIGE's existing research and gender statistics to highlight the different realities that women and men could be facing in the light of the pandemic.

Consider these measures for addressing the issue in your gender equality plan

In order to account for the changing context, organisations should consider undertaking a **review of the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality** as part of the development or review of their GEP. A review may include a **survey of the organisation** and **participatory workshops** to understand these challenges in more depth. A review should aim to understand the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in the organisation and identify what steps or measures may be required to mitigate this impact, in line with the goals of the GEP, including:

- engaging with staff and students to understand the impact of COVID-19 on working practices and outcomes;

- identifying where disruption and changes in working practices present a risk to the aims and objectives of the GEP;

- maintaining and enhancing the visibility and prioritisation of the GEP, including at senior levels and in organisational planning, and awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality;

- enhancing the monitoring of key objectives, such as in research funding decisions to maintain or improve gender balance of principal investigators and distribution of project tasks;

- reviewing relevant policies to ensure that risks are appropriately mitigated, and additional support is provided where necessary, including:

 - work–life balance policies to address the impact and needs associated with homeworking and care responsibilities for staff and students;

 - workload arrangements to ensure that the burden of new working practices is distributed fairly and does not exacerbate existing gender inequalities;

 - management and supervision arrangement to ensure that appropriate support for new patterns of working is in place and ensuring inclusive practices;

 - evaluation arrangements for career progression to ensure unequal burdens and effects are accounted for;

 - additional support for specific groups, such as early-stage researchers or those on temporary contracts, who may be particularly affected;

 - sexual harassment policies to ensure that they address risks associated with the increased use of online tools for collaboration and teaching;

- enhancing arrangements within funding and approval processes of both research funding bodies and research organisations to ensure that sex and gender analysis is fully incorporated into research design on COVID-19;

- considering whether additional sections should be added to the GEP to address the specific issues associated with COVID-19 and to ensure plans are in place for future

risks.

In order to get more information about the current knowledge on measures mitigating the effect of COVID-19, check out the resources provided in the **tab 'Tools and resources'**.

Get some tips on what to consider when implementing measures

When thinking about how to respond to the gender effects of COVID-19, consider the [available data](#) and **research uncovering the underlying dynamics**. This research is still ongoing at the time of writing this text, but the following connections could be identified so far.

The first available data shows that COVID-19-related measures, such as telework resulting from partial or full lockdown, social distancing and travel restrictions, have a disproportionate impact on women, affecting work–life balance, the gendered distribution of care activities, and their well-being and mental health.

A similar situation prevails in research organisations, as women scholars and researchers also bear the greatest share of care duties in their couples or families, thus limiting their capacity to maintain a similar pace in terms of scientific production and activity. This resulted in a sharp drop in the number of academic papers submitted for publication in international journals, as documented in many disciplines.

Research funding is also at stake, as massive resources are poured into COVID-19-related research projects. First indications show that women and men are not equally involved in this endeavour, thus increasing the gender gap in terms of access to research funding.

It is also reported that women scientists and experts have been widely invisible in providing expertise and solutions to the current crisis, thus increasing a persisting gap in terms of scientific visibility, but also undermining the capacity of human societies to adopt a gender-sensitive response to the multilayered COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 crisis is being followed by major economic turmoil, primarily affecting services in which women constitute the majority of the workforce (such as tourism, retail, financial services), and placing lower-paid sectors dominated by women, such as healthcare and home care, in the frontline. Hence, gender-sensitive data and research are required more than ever to tackle the situation, for which specific measures are to be adopted in research organisations and research funding bodies.

Note that, as time goes by, more and more information and resources will be available to understand the effects of COVID-19 on gender equality and how to mitigate them. Besides the EIGE website cited above, check out the [references collected by the European Commission](#) . On its website, you can find recent and ongoing projects and initiatives with a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Get inspired by what other organisations have implemented

Here are some **examples of measures** implemented in other organisations (note that they will open in a new window):

equality, diversity and inclusion at University College Dublin during the COVID-19 pandemic, University College Dublin, Ireland,

GenderResearch4COVID-19 support, Foundation for Science and Technology, and Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, Portugal,

mini-grants for academic teachers, 'ensuring equal opportunities for women and men researchers who combine work and childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic',

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland,

ProGender project, Centre for Gender Studies, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Greece,

updated regulations on remote working and care leave (up to 3 days without approval), National Institute of Chemistry, Slovenia.

You can find further inspirational examples in the following sources:

EIGE provides a section on [good practices](#) for various relevant topics; these sustainable measures were already mentioned in the first version of the gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) tool and are still in place.

If you want to learn more about how you can adjust these measures for your own purposes and how to implement them through a GEP, read the step-by-step guide for [research organisations, universities and public bodies](#), or the step-by-step guide for [research funding organisations](#).