

First Gender Equality Oriented Recommendations for the Management of Crises and their Consequences in German Research Organizations

The Corona crisis exacerbates and clarifies social realities - with regard to the relations between the genders, too. We are being confronted with an impressive demonstration of just how fragile gender justice is anchored in German science organizations even to this day. The current increase in structural discrimination against female scientists does not "only" harm the career histories of individuals. Also the quality and reputation of the science system will suffer a lasting adverse impact, unless courageous, committed and effective countermeasures will be taken.

Against this background, the Gender Equality Officers of the research organizations address the responsible decision-makers and protagonists in their organizations with the following Gender Equality oriented recommendations. They are based on the analysis of concrete observations on the development of Gender Equality in the science institutions during the last months.

Data are based on the results of a survey (May 2020) among Gender Equality Officers in German research organizations and universities on the Gender Equality status in its facilities in times of Corona¹¹; a discussion forum to deepen the findings of the survey with 90 Gender Equality Officers (26.5.2020) and a survey (April 2020) among all bukof members regarding examples of good practice in the way universities deal with organizing the new work situation in the context of Covid-19. The forums mentioned above were characterized by the fact that representatives of all types of higher education institutions and research organisations were involved.

1. Unbureaucratic and immediate support of women in science and scientific management

The increased burden on people with care responsibilities - mostly women and mothers - is an obstacle to a scientific career also in less crisis-ridden situations. Measures that counteract this - the crediting of times absent due to care obligations within the framework of competitive selection procedures, contract renewals, financial and organizational support for childcare and contract extension phases - must be reinforced and extended in order to bridge periods of crisis and their consequences. The strength of this approach is its immediate effectiveness.

Nearly half (45%) of the Gender Equality officers in universities and research organisations observe an increase in structural discrimination against female scientists and technical-administrative staff in their institution. In addition to the already widely and publicly discussed problem of the multiple burden on women working from home through care work and home schooling, the main aspects mentioned in the report are health and digitalization, which impair (or are perceived as impairment) the efficiency of work, the career progression or the success of studies.

¹ In May 2020 a questionnaire was sent by e-mail to 381 institutions. The response rate was 55% with 210 completed questionnaires. 18 universities, 13 universities of applied sciences / (technical) colleges for applied sciences, 6 artists' colleges and universities of applied sciences and 173 research institutes (Max Planck Society, Fraunhofer Society, Leibniz Association, Helmholtz Association) took part. The results can be found attached.

2. Cooperation between politics and science

The basis for targeted financial, organizational and social support is a successful and sustainable cooperation between the research organizations and the relevant political bodies. The latter must, inter alia, finance support measures from public funds on a transnational basis and determine in due time the right legal framework conditions to this end. With this, however trapped in a field between the desired support and the obstacles of funding laws, the risk of a rising impression that women are simply not prepared for the time-consuming work in the science system and not suitable (not mobile, not available, not independent, not powerful enough) will be diminished.

This is where the impact of the Corona crisis as a catalyst for social conflicts becomes apparent. The fact that public funds may not be used to finance childcare is a well-known problem of personnel development in the scientific sector. Several participants of the hearing underlined that the consequences resulting from this ban would currently escalate.

3. Childcare is no substitute for a structural Gender Equality strategy

In any case, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that the connotation between "women" and "family" does not become too strong again and that gender policy is not reduced to financial and organizational support for mothers in view of the developments in times of crisis. The individual support of better reconciliation of work and family life is only a small part of a successful Gender Equality strategy. It helped to overcome the gender imbalance in career prospects in science, but could not eliminate it. The boundaries of Gender Equality are still very much characterized by structural phenomena such as the glass ceiling, unconscious bias and old-fashioned roles or attributions.

The "re-traditionalization of the private sphere" must not be reacted to by resorting to an outdated model of Gender Equality work. An intersectional perspective is also necessary and contemporary here. The weakness of individual measures lies in their lack of sustainability. On the other hand, the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap are expected to be sustainably increased to the disadvantage of women. Therefore, an inclusive approach is needed which takes into account the cultural and structural conditions of the country and its scientific system and, if necessary, changes them. Management assessment and personnel selection procedures must be designed in such a way that they are permeable to the recruited measures and allow them to be effective.

According to the observation of the Gender Equality Officers, discrimination does not only exist through multiple burdens and lack of resources, but also as result of the low esteem for persons working in home office and their services and of insisting on processes and procedures that are bound to be operated in presence. This means that women in science and science management are particularly obviously excluded from important processes in the current situation.

4. Preserving Gender Equality achievements: application of gender mainstreaming

To do one thing - to support reconciliation now - and not to leave the other - to continue preserving Gender Equality standards, is a goal, which, if reached, will also improve the starting position for future crises. It is obvious: The incompatibility of science and family care would not be a (women's) issue in the crisis if it had not been before. Scientific institutions has to consider and consistently integrate Gender Equality aspects into the development of strategies against the impact of crises from the very beginning.

Even though gender policy ought to be at the top of the agenda in view of the gender-specific grievances that have recently come to light, many of the women's and Gender Equality Officers report on the current marginalization of the issue: Gender aspects are not taken into account in education, research, development, management, and strategy in an appropriate manner. This would apply, for example, to areas of decentralized and central administration and digital teaching. Another example is the lack of Gender Equality issues on the agenda of central commissions.

5. New work: seeing opportunities and establishing future-oriented instruments

Never before have new working models (new work concepts) been implemented so immediately and comprehensively. Mobile working can improve the Gender and Diversity Equality of research organizations by encouraging the flexible participation of people from a wide range of different backgrounds, locations, phases of life, needs, and possibilities. In order to achieve inclusive framework conditions, we need a screening of mobile and digital working methods regarding their strengths and risks from a Gender Equality oriented perspective.

Many institutions offer very good and quick solutions for the implementation of new forms of work. This is visible by the collection of good practice examples among all bukof members: There you can find numerous examples of good practice on the part of the universities in organizing the new work situation in the context of Corona-crisis in teaching, research and administration²

6. Recourse to expertise: involvement of Gender Equality Officers

Scientific institutions do not need to stem the current and future challenges of crises absolutely on their own. Recourse to the expertise and perspective of Gender Equality Officers is crucial, smart and target-oriented in this context. To provide them with comprehensive and timely information, their integration into the crisis board is recommended. In this way, early and competent Gender Equality policy advice for management can be ensured.

11% of women's and Gender Equality Officers consider their participation rights to be restricted in times of corona and the related digitalization of procedures and committee meetings. Against the background that 82% are not invited to the central crisis team and that 64% are not invited to the extended crisis team of their institution, the first assessment is questionable. The consequences are to be expected with a time lag and need to be documented.

7. Working Group Gender Equality in Times of Corona

In May 2020, an AGbaF-bukof working group was founded. It aims to develop Gender Equality strategies during and after the (Corona) crisis on a national level. Its members are Gender Equality Officers of universities and research organizations.

Your contact person:

Spokeswoman of the AGbaF:

Dr. Ulla Weber
Central Gender Equality Officer of the Max Planck Society

ulla.weber@gv.mpg.de
Office: zgb-office@mpg.de

² [https://bukof.de/wp-content/uploads/Good-Practice-Corona and Equality.pdf](https://bukof.de/wp-content/uploads/Good-Practice-Corona-and-Equality.pdf)