

Objective: Raise awareness for work-life balance and gender aspects while aiming for academic progress during the COVID-19 pandemic

All of the EU-LIFE Institutes and their employees are being confronted by multiple challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Political decisions and actions differ amongst EU countries and thus each EU-LIFE Institute has probably implemented different policies related to the conduct of research activities. **In this context, we want to create awareness for work-life balance issues and gender aspects while aiming for academic progress during the pandemic.**

The scientific and clinical professionals as well as administration and support staff are facing multiple stressful challenges because of the urge to continue working remotely, while balancing child and eldercare and dealing with fear, anxiety and social isolation. These responsibilities and threats are leading to a reduced number of effective working hours during the daytime and impact health and well-being of employees trying to overcome this daytime reduction by working during the late evening or even at night. Some work activities, such as laboratory work, cannot be conducted in a home office, limiting workers' effectiveness and progress.

The EU-LIFE Gender Equality Working Group (GWG) highly appreciates the open acknowledgement of the above listed challenges by several EU-LIFE directors and would like to offer the Working Group's support in discussing possible measures minimizing negative effects for individual employees and their institute.

The mentioned work-life balance challenges might cause (or strengthen) a gender difference during this COVID-19 pandemic, as still today women tend to take the bigger share of caring responsibilities in many families. First analyses from journal editors¹ disclose that during the COVID-19 pandemic women seem to publish less than they do normally, while men publish even more (in some research fields). Elsevier is planning to do a full analysis across all their journals how submission patterns for women and men have changed during the COVID-19 period (information received through personal communication).

The GWG will continue to monitor the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and on gender differences and it will propose measures to counteract this. To start with, the GWG would encourage all EU-LIFE directors to openly discuss these topics in their institute and take possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic into account when evaluating employees.

¹ <https://www.thelily.com/women-academics-seem-to-be-submitting-fewer-papers-during-coronavirus-never-seen-anything-like-it-says-one-editor/>