

## Families in the Corona Crisis

April 17, 2020

Dear member institutions of the Netzwerk *Familie in der Hochschule e.V.*,

In view of the challenges of dealing with the Corona pandemic, we would like to remind you of the difficult situation in families and ask you not to lose sight of your relatives with children or caring responsibilities in any measures you take.

The far-reaching conversion to home office in research and administration as well as to digital study and teaching with simultaneous contact closure and the closure of day-care centres and schools reinforce the already existing inequalities: The imbalance in the distribution of care work between mothers and fathers in two-parent families (gender care gap) has been sufficiently documented. Traditional family role assignments between men and women, fathers and mothers are intensified in this crisis. Even now, it is mainly women who take care of the children, the food, the shopping and other household tasks, which - since all family members are at home all the time - are increasing. Reliefs such as childcare, schools, care services, grandparents, domestic help are omitted because of the radical distance requirement. In these cases, if the tasks are not distributed equally among several in the family, the individuals - mostly women - are confronted with not being able to manage the tasks in the home office or online studies to the extent intended. We therefore call for tasks and performance requirements to be adapted to the individual - this is a task for managers and lecturers, and dealing with it should be reflected in personal counselling services offered by universities.

Gender equity must be taken into account when developing instruments for crisis management. This was pointed out by the Federal Conference of Women's and Gender Equality Representatives at Universities (bukof) and the Alliance of Gender Equality Representatives of Non-University Research Organisations (AGbaF) in a letter to the GWK Chairwoman, Minister Karliczek.

We would like to draw your attention here to how the lockdown as a result of the coronavirus pandemic is affecting individual areas in universities with regard to the compatibility of family responsibilities with tasks in work, research, study and teaching. With initial recommendations for action, we would like to provide you with information on how employees and students who have a family to care for can be well accompanied through the crisis at the universities.

## Study and teaching

When switching to digital teaching, it is also important to take into account the conditions at the place of learning - and thus to guarantee the right to equal education: Is the appropriate technology available and to what extent (in terms of time and data transmission)? Is there quiet in the room?

### Recommendations:

- Support for teachers and students with technical equipment and training courses.
- Offers to teachers to hand over tasks to others - e.g. technical implementation, email support for students, etc., possibly through additional assistants.
- Consideration of the special life situations of the students by the lecturers with temporal flexibility in scheduling, if possible renunciation of online events in "real time".
- Compensation for disadvantages for students with family responsibilities as well as for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses.
- Good communication of support services and benefits.

## junior scientists

We fear that the Corona crisis will have a long-term negative impact on the evaluation of their achievements, especially their research results and publication lists. While colleagues without children or other dependents to care for are likely to use their time in the home office in many cases to advance research and publication projects, the time resources and freedom available for this purpose have become even smaller due to family obligations. In many cases, the little time available is completely consumed by compulsory teaching duties.

### Recommendations:

- Distribution and coordination of tasks and deadlines at chairs, in research teams and projects in such a way that family obligations and official concerns are taken into account in equal measure.
- ☐ Solidary distribution of tasks in teams.
- Extension of deadlines, e.g. for applications, evaluations or the submission of research results.
- Opportunities for transitional funding or extensions of scholarships and qualifying positions.
- Consideration of the delays parents experience in their research, publications, and number of academic presentations due to daycare and school closures, currently and later in performance evaluations.

## Employees in technology and administration

The simultaneity of home office and childcare is a fallacy. Anyone who has to manage tasks in the home office to even approximately the same extent as in the office cannot also look after children at the same time. For example, video conferences with children in the background do not do justice to both sides - if they are possible at all.

It is also not in the spirit of an equal opportunity and family-oriented university to refer parents in this predicament to special leave and the claiming of overtime. Moreover, these options are only a drop in the ocean when daycare centers and schools are closed for several weeks.

Competing teams can also make it difficult for parents to cope. Unfortunately, it cannot be assumed that all superiors communicate in a benevolent manner. Here, clear signals from the top are needed from the university management, encouraging and requesting that the needs of employees be addressed in order to preserve the university's equal opportunities and family orientation even in times of crisis.

### Recommendations:

- Exhaustion of all legal possibilities to reconcile professional tasks in the home office and family tasks at home.
- Supporting managers to apply these freedoms.
- Family-oriented and collegial coordination between supervisors and employees in the team with regard to availability and the respective scope of duties.

Experience and feedback to date show that numerous supportive and helpful measures are already being implemented at the universities. We are collecting examples of good practice and would like to make them available to all our member universities. We therefore continue to welcome your contributions. An abridged version of this statement for your own further use as well as an overview of good practice examples can also be found on the Internet at [www.familie-in-der-hochschule.de](http://www.familie-in-der-hochschule.de).

We send you our warmest greetings - and stay healthy everyone!

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