

Standing for Gender Equality in Science in times of Covid-19

This year's UN Human Rights Day focuses on the need to build back better following the Covid-19 pandemic by ensuring Human Rights are central to recovery efforts. To end the pandemic and build a strong recovery, we need to build good science. And we can only do that by giving women — half of humankind — the same possibility that men have to contribute their talent and dedication to building the science we need.

Scientists around the world have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, not all scientists are affected in the same ways and to the same extent. Women are hit particularly hard, especially those at an early stage of their careers. There are two main reasons for that:

- Women form the majority of caregivers, for children and for elders. During the pandemic, the difficulties of these women in accessing working space, equipment and resources are compounded by an increased burden of domestic work.
- The proportion of women scientists who do not have secure full-time employment is higher than that of men scientists. Women are also more likely than men to find themselves in temporary 'adjunct' posts in which they may only be paid when teaching courses.

As a consequence of these two factors, since the outbreak of the pandemic, there has been [a decline in the relative proportion of women posting preprints](#) and submitting research projects. This in turn often puts their career advancement or continued employment at risk.

In this time of pandemic, when a health crisis combines with an economic crisis, the work of scientists is critical. The world stands to lose much unless all scientists are in a position to pursue their work in good conditions and also if a significant number of scientists drop out of their research careers.

Just as some governments support the preservation of jobs endangered by the pandemic, it is urgent to take action to prevent science from losing some of its most promising contributors. This can be done by upholding and further developing measures aimed at supporting and promoting women's research and academic careers. Here are some possible ways to act in this direction during the present crisis.

- Academic institutions should urgently extend the contracts of academics who are in temporary positions, and they should take caregiver burdens into account when scheduling decisions about promotion or tenure.
- Funding agencies and recruitment committees should take into account the burdens of increased caregiving and of preparing online teaching (often at short notice) when assessing applications, as these are major causes of lapses in research productivity.
- Journals should ask authors to indicate their caregiving burden, and put authors who report a major load of childcare or eldercare at the front of the queue for publication.
- Fees for online conferences should be adjusted for participants who have lost income due to pandemic-related job changes or caregiver responsibilities.

All these forms of support need to be publicized widely, so as to encourage those who can benefit from them to submit their papers and projects.

The Standing Committee for Gender Equality in Science calls for all individuals and institutions engaged in science to join forces in supporting women colleagues whose research careers are jeopardized by the pandemic.