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## Press Release

### **New EU Report on Why Women in Academia Need Special Support Even After the Pandemic**

**The European Commission has published a new report (*Policy Report*) on the consequences the coronavirus pandemic has had on women in research and development. A central finding is that female early-stage researchers, in particular, are suffering from the consequences of the pandemic and need more support. This is the key result of the study conducted by the working group headed by Marc Lerchenmüller, researcher at the Business School of the University of Mannheim, which focused on women in the early career stage. In total, 14 researchers from all over Europe have formed four working groups on different topics and worked on the report.**

The goal of the EU report is to give recommendations on how individual states can try to relieve the consequences the pandemic had on academia and how existing European research programs, such as Horizon Europe or ERC grants, can be adjusted. The working group headed by junior professor Dr. Marc Lerchenmüller focused on women in the early career stage. The researcher at the University of Mannheim is the only author of the *Policy Report* who is based in German.

A key recommendation of his working group is to collect long-term data in the individual EU countries to assess the post-pandemic situation of female early-career researchers, a process which is also referred to as monitoring. Such data are the basis for assessing the situation of female early-career researchers and for creating helpful funding programs. “The consequences after two years of living in a pandemic are not gone after the two years”, says Lerchenmüller.

Existing funding programs that have been created for early-stage researchers during the pandemic should be revised. “Equal treatment does not mean equal opportunities”, the Mannheim researcher says. After all, female early-stage researchers with small children were those who lost the most hours of their working time during the pandemic - as the data show. “Trying to use gender-neutral interventions to level these differences is unfair”, says Lerchenmüller.

The publication output of women and men is also different. Before the coronavirus pandemic, there were near equal proportions of male and female researchers as first authors in Covid-relevant fields like immunology or virology. Then the gap widened: Male

researchers published more often than their female colleagues. And since an academic career is closely linked to publication output, this could have the long-term effect that the share of male researchers in leading positions at universities and research institutions will grow. The working group suggests that the track record of early-stage researchers with children is evaluated differently than the record of those who have been less affected by the coronavirus pandemic, such as women and men living alone, without children or relatives to take care of.

Beyond the consequences for individual careers, these data also call into question whether society was able to provide the best response to the pandemic when female scientists were less able to contribute and be heard than one could have expected, due to structural reasons.

### **Profile**

European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel appointed Marc Lerchenmüller to the experts' committee, due to Lerchenmüller's research on science policy and gender influence on academic careers. As assistant professor, he has held the chair of Technological Innovation and Management at the University of Mannheim since 2019. His study on the reduced publication output of female researchers during the coronavirus pandemic, on which Lerchenmüller worked with colleagues of the universities in Harvard, Heidelberg, and Mannheim, was published in the *British Medical Journal Open* and is available [here](#).

The *Policy Report "The Covid-19 Impact on Gender Equality in Research & Innovation"* is available [here](#).

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