

Message on COVID 19 to EEA members and supporters:

The COVID-19 global pandemic causes difficulties for many groups in society. Everybody's vulnerable. However, this message wants to draw your attention to the fact that some among us are more vulnerable than others. Hopefully, it can contribute to alleviating some of the challenges we are facing.

One group that may experience significant challenges at this moment is our graduate students. Quite often, students in PhD programs in economics have multiple roles: they take courses, they teach – as assistants or instructors – and they conduct their own research. Moreover, the resources available to them tend to be limited, in terms of office space, home IT technology, or administrative assistance. The pandemic makes many of the tasks graduate students face significantly harder; some may even be impossible to conduct, such as field work research. In addition, they may be physically isolated.

Another group for whom we suspect the pandemic and lockdown measures to hit particularly hard is female economists. In many places women are expected to take a larger share of the responsibility for children and for parents, and these responsibilities do become much heavier during times of lockdown and health challenges. It is, moreover, only natural to prioritize these new tasks at home, making it very difficult, if not overwhelming, to keep up performance at work - be it in teaching, research, or administrative activities in our economic community.

There are other challenges as well, for example among those with relatives in other countries, or those with temporary work contracts; for graduate students and researchers employed based on time-limited funds, worries about job security can rise significantly. More generally, the stress and anxiety surrounding all these difficulties can be amplified by the uncertainty about how long it will take to return to normal, something epidemiologists as well as policymakers appear very unsure of.

With this background, the EEA recommends that departments consider taking immediate steps to alleviate the concerns of the most vulnerable among us. For graduate students, this may involve modifying academic requirements, extending timelines for progression and completion, and providing emergency funding and other forms of support. For other groups, generally thinking about reduced workloads, extended deadlines, and prolonged financing can be useful. Universities across Europe surely have different resources, needs, and schedules, so one size is unlikely to fit all. We therefore encourage you to think creatively about possible ways to address these challenges. The American Economic Association just made a similar announcement to their members. There, they report on a variety of measures that U.S. economics departments have taken.

Our current and future research in economics, our teaching of the subject, and our ability to provide sound policy advice on economic matters all rest on the health of economics departments, including our graduate programs. So please help in making sure that our workplaces are thoughtfully guided forward during these difficult times. If you have comments or questions in this important matter, please do not hesitate to contact me or the EEA.

Sincerely,

Per Krusell (President of the EEA), on behalf of the EEA Executive Committee