

We request extensions of PhD and Postdoc contracts due to the COVID-19 crisis

To Ingrid van Engelshoven, Minister of Education, Culture and Science

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We are writing to urge you to address the critical issues PhD students and postdoctoral researchers (Postdocs) in the Netherlands are facing during and will be facing after the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask for your help, as many PhDs and Postdocs all around the world did, to urge their institutions or governments to consider their critical situation (e.g. [UK](#), [Sweden](#), [Canada](#)).

Universities and research institutes across the Netherlands have mostly suspended their main activities or are operating with minimal staff on site following COVID-19 prevention measures. This has a severe impact on the ability of PhD students and Postdocs to conduct their research for the following reasons:

- **Many PhD students and Postdocs are physically prevented from working.** This applies to those who require access to departmental facilities such as laboratories and technology to carry out their research. It may also apply to those whose fieldwork is prevented or disrupted, whereby they will not be able to collect essential data, or those who lose access to archive material. Additionally, limited communication with colleagues and collaboration partners might affect the research. Moreover, due to limited public transport capacities and the overall advice to not use public transport, people have difficulties reaching their workplace in a safe manner.
- The digitalization of teaching has meant that PhDs and Postdocs, as well as professors and other university staff, have taken on **more workload than usual** to guarantee the continuation of the academic year by redesigning entire courses and practicals to an online-based format.
- **Many PhDs and postdocs see their physical and mental health severely affected**, preventing them from concentrating on their intellectually-demanding research. This is especially true for the people originally from countries which have been severely affected by the epidemic, those whose family members or loved ones are at risk, and those who already suffer from a number of anxiety disorders.
- The current crisis **requires many PhD students and Postdocs to spend time on practical concerns.** They have to navigate work with the care for children and other family members at home, due to the closure of all daycare facilities and schools. This takes time and energy which would otherwise have been allocated to their research. Additionally, many PhD students and Postdocs do not have a suitable home office to be able to productively conduct their work.

This puts many PhD students and Postdocs in a difficult situation. Research in the framework of a PhD or Postdoc project is undertaken with limited resources, both in terms of time and finances. Many PhD students and Postdocs will have to redirect their efforts away from their research to manage the issues described above. This will also affect the quality of the research which is carried out at this university or research institute. PhD students and Postdocs in the end-phase of their contracts will be prevented from collecting and publishing results. PhDs and Postdocs in the beginning of their contracts will be delayed in setting-up lab equipment, field work campaigns and engaging in collaborations. This crisis might therefore result in **less publications and diminishes the scientific and societal impact of this research and of the funding of this research.** To avoid this situation,

