

EGU24-410, updated on 19 May 2024

<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu24-410>

EGU General Assembly 2024

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Family-Friendly Conferences in the Geosciences

Elena Päßgen, Leonie Esters, and Lisa Schielicke

University of Bonn, Geosciences, Meteorology, Germany (epaeffgen@gmx.de)

Participation in (inter-) national conferences, seminars, and workshops such as the EGU General Assembly is important for professional exchange and personal networking, especially for early career scientists. Enabling scientists with family obligations to take part in conferences will increase gender equity and diversity, as women remain to be the main caregivers in most families.

The questions of family planning and kickstarting a professional career arise simultaneously in almost any field. What makes this particularly challenging for young families in academia is that this line of work frequently requires for parents to move, making traditional forms of supportive caregiving by extended family members often unavailable. The vital role conference attendance plays for an academic career only aggravates that challenge. Therefore, a lack of opportunities to attend conferences and workshops clearly puts young parents at a disadvantage, especially young women in academia.

The Project for Family-Friendly Conferences has been initiated by Leonie Esters and Lisa Schielicke from the Department of Geosciences at the University of Bonn in April 2023. Elena Päßgen joined as a research assistant (WHK) later the same year. With an initial duration of one and a half years the project is funded by the Gleichstellungsbüro (office for equal opportunities) of the university. Our principal goal is to find out, how conference and workshop participation can be made more family-friendly.

The present work analyses an online survey with 245 participants who were interviewed on the topic of family-friendly conferences. The survey was addressed to all scientists with a focus on geosciences, 58% of all participants claimed to have children, while 42% were childless. 61 comments expressing wishes and needs of parents and guardians we received from the participants underscore the urgency of the matter. Key concerns of the participants were clear communication (e.g., whether children could be brought along to the events in question), awareness among event-organizers, and easy access to financial assistance (e.g. for babysitting). For instance, more hybrid events, on-site childcare and designated family-friendly activities at conferences were named as possible improvements. However, considering that families and their challenges are diverse, a wide array of offers and flexibility are required to address their needs.

Our project aims to educate the wider academic community on family-specific challenges. Based on the results of this survey, we will provide conference organizers with guidelines to improve family-friendliness of conferences and facilitate their exchange among each other. Additionally, we

want to keep parents informed about the offers for families that are already in place at conferences in our field of study. Overall, we are convinced that outcomes of our project will be beneficial for conference and workshop organizers likewise as for researchers who are parents and will contribute to gender equity and diversity in academia.

Children, parents and guardians are particularly welcome to the poster presentation and discussion.

If you would like to participate in our survey: <https://www.empirio.de/s/VxLGGLxWv2>

A SURVEY

Scan to participate!

Towards More Family Friendly Conferences and Meetings!

① This survey is part of a project initiated by the department of Geosciences at the University of Bonn that intends to make conferences more family friendly and is funded by the Office of Equal Opportunities.

UNIVERSITÄT BONN Zentrales Gleichstellungsbüro
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn
Regina-Pacis-Weg 3 | 53113 Bonn

Do you have any questions or ideas concerning this topic? Contact us via: familyfriendlyconferences@uni-bonn.de