Eurasia Lab & Fellowship Program

Guidlines to conducting research during the
COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only changed our daily life but also our work as researchers. Interviews and conferences can only be held digitally, libraries have closed and working from home does not necessarily offer the quiet environment one needs to conduct research attentively. What is the best way for researchers to adapt to the new circumstances and how can we overcome the hurdles resulting from these? These were the questions addressed by the participants of the first workshop of the "Eurasia Lab & Fellowship Program" on 15 October 2020 on the topic "How the COVID-19 Pandemic Affects my Work as a Researcher in/on Eurasia - and What to do About it". Following our discussion, we have addressed common challenges among researchers and have created guidelines to better cope with these difficulties and find beneficial aspects emerging from the changing working environment for research.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

With libraries closed or partially restricted, it can prove difficult to find a quiet working environment. Working as a parent from home can be challenging and especially female researchers are increasingly disadvantaged through the consequences of the pandemic.

When struggling, seek to:

• Inform yourself about possible childcare subsidies for research grants.

• Ask for the extension of deadlines for parent researchers working from home. During a pandemic you have less time to do research, which should entitle you to more time to conduct it properly.

💰 FUNDING

The COVID-19 pandemic has made access to funding even harder as many potential resources of funding became unavailable due to changes in funding policies to the benefits of the fight against the virus and its implications.

When struggling to get access to funding, seek to:

• Ask about the easing up of the age restriction of applying for certain programs.

• Ask about paid leaves (or e.g. fewer teaching hours)to apply for funding.

• Ask for accelerated review processes for publications. A comprehensive record of publications will improve your career prospects in general and your chances for funding.

📋 MOTIVATION

Struggling to find motivation and staying optimistic for ongoing research projects is quite normal in this situation.

When you are feeling overwhelmed, seek to:

• Acknowledge the benefits of this situation: You can attend events online with the click of a button versus spending time and money on travel.

• Remember that the situation has made some new or previously inaccessible online resources available that can contribute to your research in a new way.

• Remember that everyone is in the same boat which gives everyone a level playing field. Previously existing institutional hierarchies at work are softened.

• Count your blessing: Having internet access at all, health care and a stable income is not a given for everyone.

⏰ TIME

Due to complications in all areas of life, administrations are responding slower, data is published later and the normal amount of time researchers can dedicate to research has been reduced considerably.

When struggling with finding enough time for your research work, seek to:

• Consider less lengthy and large-scale projects for the time being.

• Come up with your own individual solution that helps you combine different aspects of your life.

🖥 TECHNOLOGY

Many libraries, administrations and institutes were not technologically prepared to provide resources for its rsearchers when the pandemic started.

If this has implications for your research work, seek to:

• Invest in digital solutions for a more communicative working environment.

• Organize very brief trainings for everyone. This will not only enhance efficiency but save time in the long-run by clarifying any questions regarding new technological platforms.

• Use new technological platforms to your advantage. Join workshops and events around the world with the klick of a button and get in touch with other researchers working on similar topics.

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ONLINE METHODS

Online panels and conferences take more concentration and energy than if conducted in person.

To achieve the highest level of efficiency, seek to:

• Spread conferences over several days.

• Consider that the optimal length of meetings should be 45 minutes, maximum one hour. Anything longer will cause a lack of concentration and efficiency among participants.

• Consider that most of the time should be used for productive discussion, not passive listening.

ⓘ ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Complications during this pandemic are causing data bases to publish their data later than usually, causing postponement in research. Various sources of information on physical paper are inaccessible.

When struggling to get the desired material, seek to:

• See this situation as an opportunity to go back to secondary literature and a chance to improve your theoretical and conceptual methods.

• Become more aware of all primary materials online and learn how to make better use of those that are already available.

• Make use of previously inaccessible online material that is now open for the public.

• Focus more on methods like sampling and interviews while access to data bases is still restricted.

🌍 FIELD WORK

Closed borders, visa complications and travel restrictions have changed the possibilities for conducting field work.

If this affects your research, seek to:

• Postpone certain research projects for another time or seek less extensive research projects and methods.

• Be flexible in choosing your methods and be open to new ways of conducting research.

• Consider if this pandemic perhaps presents you with new opportunities for interesting research aspects that are only conductible in such an unprecedented situation.
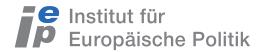
💬 INTERVIEWS AND COMMUNICATION

Switching from face-to-face interviews to virtual interviews has brought a range of new challenges with it, lack of human interaction and personal contact just being one of them.

In order to still conduct interviews efficiently during the pandemic, seek to:

• Conduct interviews virtually no longer than 45 min to one hour. Longer interviews cause a lack of concentration and in many regions in Eurasia internet connection will slow down after a certain time span.

• Choose interview partners (when working with multiple people simultaneously) that are especially motivated and beneficial for your research and contact them for private discussions to enhance the quality of your research.

• Use the advantage of being able to combine several research projects by connecting with individuals around the world with the click of a button.

• Consider hybrid events (small events with up to a dozen people that are then streamed for the public) to establish some level of human interaction.

Eurasia Lab & Fellowship Program

With the "Eurasia Lab & Fellowship Program" the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) makes use of its vast expertise in and on the Eurasia region. It connects its different networks on Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe and integrates them with other already existing networks. To this end, the program organizes different networking activities as a series of online events in fall 2020 and spring 2021 to bring together researchers, practitioners and activists working on the Eurasia region. It also gives the opportunity to outstanding junior researchers from Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe to receive a scholarship to advance their research projects and to get integrated into the network.

Contact

Since its founding in 1959, IEP has been a non-profit organization dedicated to the study of European integration. It is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany and serves as a forum for exchange between academia, politics, administration and political education.

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