



SUSTAINABLE WORKING CONDITIONS IN ACADEMIA SURVEY (STAIRCASE)



Informed consent form

The EU-funded project “Researcher Mental Health Observatory” (ReMO) is conducting the largest ever benchmark study to assess the state of work-related wellbeing and mental health among researchers in Europe. ReMO is a network of researchers, working in work and organizational psychology, science policy and data science from 37 European countries that care about working conditions of academics. ReMO is lead by the researchers from the Leibniz-Informationszentrum Technik und Naturwissenschaften | Universitätsbibliothek in Germany, the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and the University of Technology Graz in Austria.

We strive to adhere to the highest standards of transparency and openness while protecting the sensitive information collected in this study. In the following, we will provide you with information about the aim of this study, benefits and risks associated with participation in this study as well as information about data usage and data protection. Therefore, before participating in the study, please read the following document carefully.

If you have any concerns or questions at any point before, during or after participating in this study, do not hesitate to contact us at STAIRCASE-Survey@tib.eu.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to gain insights about the causes of workplace wellbeing and mental health in academia in order to develop tailored, effective, and efficient interventions that improve the mental health of academics.

Why should you participate?

This study is conducted by researchers for researchers. Our explicit aim is to change the academic system from within, in a way that allows for healthy and sustainable working conditions. By providing us with information about your mental health and working conditions, we will be able to draw inferences that help us evidence and inform recommendations for policy changes. Your efforts will help us to ensure adequate representation of your institution and country, and improves the odds that we will ultimately have enough data to formulate institution- and country-specific recommendations specific to your context and circumstances.

What are the risks of participation?

We have implemented protection measures to safeguard your data (see section “Data protection” below). This is necessary because the information you provide us with may bear the risk of re-identification through unique combinations of demographic information. This is

potentially possible for example if you are the only female physics PostDoc in your institution. We will not publicly release any data in which individuals can be identified in any way.

By participating in this survey you will be confronted with questions about your mental health. We will ask you about symptoms of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Thinking about and answering these questions might prompt you to discover a mental health issue you were previously not aware of. To mitigate this risk, we provide information about contact points and help lines that can help you with any mental health issues that you may be facing. The [Samaritans](#) offer a global crisis hotline you can reach at 116 123. In addition, you can use the following services to find a helpline specific to your country:

- [Mental Health Europe](#) for countries in the EU
- [findahelpline](#) for countries in- and outside the EU

What is involved in participating in the study?

The study involves filling out an online survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. The questions will include measures of mental health, such as symptoms of depression, as well as measures of wellbeing such as work satisfaction. In addition, we will ask you questions about your work as an academic, such as how many hours you work per week and how much of your time you spend on different tasks. Lastly, we will ask you demographic questions such as your age and gender. All questions are voluntary and you can skip questions at any point in the survey.

You will have the possibility to voluntarily provide us with identifiers of your profiles on ORCID, LinkedIn, Twitter and Mastodon at the end of the survey. This information will be stored separately from your survey responses. It allows us to link mental health and working conditions to other observables such as research performance, career paths, and sentiment on social media.

Who is behind this study?

The study is conducted by researchers within the EU Funded [COST Action CA19117](#) “Researcher Mental Health Observatory” - ReMO. The action focuses on wellbeing and mental health within academia, a theme of strategic importance for the European Research Area. You can find more details about ReMO on the project [website](#). The institution responsible for coordinating this survey is TIB – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Technik und Naturwissenschaften | Universitätsbibliothek.

After the project is concluded, responsibility for the collected data will be transferred to a long-term data storage provider, the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW).

If you have any concerns or questions at any point before, during or after participating in this study, do not hesitate to contact us at STAIRCASE-Survey@tib.eu.

How can I withdraw from this study?

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any point without providing any reasons for doing so and without consequences. To withdraw from the study, simply do not continue to fill in the survey questionnaire. Your responses will be recorded up to the point where you stopped filling in the survey. Regarding further rights please see the section “Your Data Protection Rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)”.

Data usage, sharing and archiving

Data collected in this study will be used for the following purposes:

1. The survey response data including all demographic information (pseudonymised data) will be stored in a secure long-term data storage facility. Researchers affiliated with academic institutions can request access to the data to conduct research and disseminate research results. After signing a data use agreement, data access will be provided in a secure data analysis environment with output controls that ensure that no personally identifying information leaves the archive. Research results shared with the public will only contain aggregated data and will not allow re-identification of respondents.
2. A second version of the survey response data will be anonymized by removing and aggregating demographic information such that no individual can be re-identified (anonymised data). This anonymized data set will be made available to members of the public after concluding a data use agreement.
3. The collected identifiers of ORCID, LinkedIn, Twitter and Mastodon profiles will be stored separately from survey responses and shared with researchers within the ReMO project for the purpose of collecting information from these profiles only. The collected identifiers will be deleted after the end of the project. Information obtained from the profiles such as the average sentiment in tweets in the last month will be aggregated and merged with the survey response data and made available for analysis in the secure data analysis environment (see point 1).

The legal basis for the collection of the data is informed consent, as specified in [Article 6\(1a\) of the GDPR](#). All terms relating to data protection are based on GDPR.

Data protection measures

Your responses will be confidential. Any identifying information such as your email address or any social media profiles that you voluntarily provide to us will be stored separately from your survey responses. A detailed description of all data protection measures can be found in our [data protection plan](#). Below we provide a summary of data protection measures when data is collected, transferred, processed, archived and accessed by researchers.

- **Data collection:** data is collected with the software [LimeSurvey](#) which is hosted on a server at the Technische Informationsbibliothek Hannover (TIB) in Germany. Data is transferred from each respondent to the server over an encrypted SSL connection and stored in an encrypted data base upon arrival at the server. Each survey

participant is assigned a unique survey participation token. Survey responses are stored alongside participation tokens and therefore pseudonymized. Participant email addresses are stored in a separate table that is not linked to survey responses and are used to prevent double participation.

- Data transfer: After the data collection phase of the study is concluded, all collected and encrypted data will be transferred to a long-term data storage facility. Subsequently, all data will be deleted from the TIB server.
- Data processing: At the end of the data collection period, participant email addresses are processed with a salted hash function and survey participation tokens are replaced with the hash values of the email addresses. This is done to enable tracking of participants over survey waves given the same email address. The resulting data set is pseudonymized (Scientific Use File). It is not fully anonymized because participants can potentially still be identified given their demographic information. An anonymized data set (Campus Use File) will be created by aggregating and removing demographic information until no single participant can be re-identified.

In addition, a second hash value is generated for each participant by running the hash function over the email addresses with a different salt. These values are stored alongside a participant's social media information and separately from survey responses, to prevent a direct link between survey responses and social media profiles. A table that links both hash values and that can be used to merge social media information with survey responses is stored at TIB. Only members of the ReMO project under supervision of the TIB data protection officer will be able to link personal identifiers and survey responses. This table will be deleted at the end of the project.

- Data archiving: Pseudonymised and anonymised data will be archived at a long-term storage facility. The archive system will be subject to strict access rights. Only authorized employees of the facility are allowed to transfer objects eligible for long-term preservation to the digital archive or remove them from the archive.
- Data access: Authorized researchers will be able to access the pseudonymized data either in person at a computer in the long-term storage facility or via remote access to a server that holds the data and pre-installed analysis programs. Researchers will have to sign data use agreements before being granted access to the data. Researchers will have to subject any files they want to export to an output control by staff of the long-term storage facility and ReMO project members to exclude any possibility of re-identification of individuals. Output controls ensure that exported data are anonymised.
- Term of storage of data: The social media handles will be deleted at the end of the ReMO project. The pseudonymised dataset (Scientific Use File) and the anonymised dataset (Campus Use File) will be stored longterm and made available as described above via the long-term storage facility and only be deleted upon request.

Ethical considerations for this study

This study was evaluated by the Ethics Commission of the Leibniz University Hannover and approved under ethics vote EV LUH 04/2023.

Dissemination of results from this study

Results derived from this study will be disseminated in a variety of ways:

- We will publish a fully anonymised version of the data collected in this study
- We will disseminate findings via academic articles and conference presentations.
- We will use the findings to write white papers and policy recommendations with the aim of changing working conditions in academia.

If you want to be informed of any results derived from the survey that are published, you will have the option of providing us with a contact email address at the end of the survey.

Your Data Protection Rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

You have the right to obtain information about the personally identifiable information collected in this survey at any time, as well as the right to rectify or erase or restrict data processing. You have a right to revoke your consent to data processing as well as the right of data portability. To exercise your rights, please contact STAIRCASE-Survey@tib.eu.

Note that you can only request, delete or rectify the information in the pseudonymised data, since we are not able to identify individuals in the anonymised data anymore. To exercise your rights, you will need to provide us with the email address you used to fill in the survey in the first place to identify your records.

Data protection responsibilities throughout the project (until Dez. 2024)

Responsible authority regarding data protection is the German National Library of Science and Technology (TIB), Welfengarten 1B, 30167 Hannover, Germany. Phone: +49(0)511 762-8989, Fax: +49(0)511 762-4076, Email: information@tib.eu

Data Protection Officer, German National Library of Science and Technology (TIB), TIB Conti-Campus, Königsworther Platz 1B, 30167 Hannover, Germany. Phone: +49(0)511-762 8138, Email: datenschutz@tib.eu.

The supervisory authority is the State Commissioner for Data Protection of Lower Saxony, Prinzenstrasse 5, 30159 Hannover, Germany. Phone: +49(0)511 120-4500, Fax: +49(0)511 120-4500, Email: poststelle@lfd.niedersachsen.de.

Complaints may be lodged with the supervisory authority via their [online form](#).

After conclusion of the project (possibly Jan. 2025), the data protection responsibilities may be transferred to the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies DZHW GmbH, Lange Laube 12, 30159 Hannover, Germany. Phone: +49(0)511 450670-0, Fax: +49(0)511 450670-960, Email: info@dzhw.eu

Data Protection Officer, German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies DZHW GmbH, Lange Laube 12, 30159 Hannover, Phone: +49(0)511 450670-491, Fax: +49(0)511 450670-960, Email: datenschutz@dzhw.eu.

The supervisory authority is the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, Graurheindorfer Straße 153, 53177 Bonn, Germany. Phone: +49(0)228 997799-0, Email: poststelle@bfdi.bund.de.

Complaints may be lodged with the supervisory authority via their [online form](#).

Informed consent to participate in the study

Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.