

# What about Hanna!?

**Hanna is considering leaving academia or has already done so. However, this is not due to a lack of skill or passion for science...**



Picture: a screenshot from the original video published by BMBF; It has been withdrawn due to social criticism.

**#IchBinHanna** - We are Hanna. The [video](#) posted by the BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany) explaining the [#WissZeitVG](#) has caused an outcry across the academic community first in June 2021. We reached out to our members and followers on social media, to ask them for their stories. We offered an anonymous platform for them to share their experiences with the board of Lise-Meitner Society.

The biggest theme among all these messages was the strain the limited contracts and the insecurity that comes with them puts on Hanna's life.

The issues already started when Hanna did her Ph.D.:

*"I had yearly contracts during my Ph.D. - Knowing full well there wouldn't be more than four. I had to finish my Ph.D. without funding. I started my current job while finishing my Ph.D. in the evenings and on weekends. It wasn't easy, but better than having to receive unemployment money" - Hanna 243*

*“During my Ph.D., I signed 7 different contracts. All of them only covered partial payment (always below 50%, most often 25%). Luckily, I managed to get scholarships to cover the rest, which helped tremendously. Not everyone is that lucky!” - Hanna 738*

Flexibility and mobility are inherent parts of the scientific career, but one needs to be also very resourceful and resilient to survive that:

*“I have signed 5 limited contracts during my Ph.D. Every single one has a long story of chaos, mismanagement, and insecurity behind it – this is usually called ‘normal flexibility in research! I came from a developing country to Germany because I wanted to follow my dreams in science which were not considered a proper way of living for a woman in my country of birth. The journey was too long and the way unpaved. Nothing worked for me as I planned before. Currently, I am not employed and I consider leaving science with regret just because I need security and mental health in my life.” - Hanna 547*

In many cases, Hanna did not continue her academic career after her Ph.D. However, whenever she did, conditions did NOT improve:

*“I have had 8 limited contracts during my first 7 years of postdoc, now the 9th one is running. No one knows how exactly a university counts the number of years one was employed there.*

*Some universities count third-party funding time (just to be safe), others don't. If they really need to fill a position, they will have you sign a self-declaration that you won't ask for a permanent position after this one has expired. I experienced both scenarios at two different universities in the same Bundesland.” - Hanna 494*

*“Until recently I was a PostDoc and wanted to become a professor. I had a 4-year contract, which got extended by another 4 years, with the “plan” of me becoming a junior group leader at the department. At the end of that first contract, I left academia. One of those reasons is that [#IchBinHannaMitFamilie](#) and a [#singleparent](#), I needed better job security than ‘the grant for your position has a pretty good success probability, we think’.” - Hanna 848*

*“I got a position as a lecturer in spite of the [#WissZeitVG](#) because I was filling a temporary need (due to a dean reducing his workload). Now my contract has run out. I applied for a permanent professorship, however, I “just” made 2nd place (and unfortunately this time No 1 seems to be intending to take the job). I am not sure how to go on. Even if I managed to secure funding from somewhere, the University would probably not be able to employ me because of [#WissZeitVG](#).” - Hanna 653*

The [#WissZeitVG](#) doesn't just dominate Hanna's career, it infiltrates her family life, and makes it too difficult to find a work/life balance:

*"My two kids were born during my Ph.D. While I was in labour, I sent emails with corrections for my first paper to my supervisor. This seemed completely normal to me, and I felt like this was necessary to ensure I could continue in academia. I never felt like I could fully go on parental leave. During my UNPAID official leave, I published several papers and handed in my thesis. Still, after returning, my supervisor told me he hadn't been content with my work for a long time."* - Hanna 738

*"My Ph.D. was ok. After my Ph.D. I joined a company, worked there for a few years, got married, and had my first child - almost exactly on the day the company closed operations.*

*My husband had always dreamed of being a professor, so I took care of the little ones while he pursued his career - until he didn't get another position and gave up academia.*

*So, I restarted my career in academia doing PostDocs. Things didn't look too bad, I even applied for a professorship. During the application process, my eldest got cancer. Our child recovered and I got another PostDoc. But by the time that contract ran out, my time on fixed-term contracts had been used up.*

*I love teaching and I love to research. But my CV is irregular because I put my family first. Since I still do so, I am not very mobile."* - Hanna 653



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Hanna is passionate about research, teaching, and pushing the boundaries of science. Additionally, Hanna is a daughter, a mother, a friend, a human being, and life does not progress in those nice little paths suggested by the BMBF. So often Hanna is forced to leave academia behind and while these issues do not exclusively affect women, women are affected more severely. The world is wondering why women drop out of academia and how to #FixTheLeakyPipeline, how about with a bit of flexibility and security?