

# Health Economics and Policy

Annual Report 2025



# **Health Economics and Policy Group (HEP)**

2025 Annual Activity Report

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# 1 HIGHLIGHTS

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- The HEP team had a total of **12 publications** including 6 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and one book chapter.
- The **Aging Health Capital** project led by **Daniela Weber** was successfully completed in 2025 and resulted in nine peer-reviewed scientific journal articles within the four-year project period, alongside additional manuscripts under review at highly ranked international journals.
- **Viktoria Szenkurök defended** her PhD dissertation entitled "*Within- and Between-Country Heterogeneities in Long-Term Care: Providing Insights from the Perspective of Users and Providers*" in October 2025.
- In collaboration with the WU Institute for Social Policy, the HEP team continues teaching and managing the five-course **WU Bachelor's Specialization in Health and Social Policy**. This specialization meets a strong demand, and currently its capacity is being increased to be able to admit more students.

## 2 THE HEALTH ECONOMICS AND POLICY GROUP

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### 2.1 THE TEAM

#### **Marcel Bilger, Professor of Health Economics and Policy, Head of Group**

Marcel Bilger holds a Ph.D. in Economics and Social Sciences with a specialization in Econometrics and Statistics from the University of Geneva. During his doctoral studies, he completed the International Doctoral Program in Health Economics and Policy from the Swiss School of Public Health+. After his Ph.D., Marcel worked as a Consultant for the Development Research Group at the World Bank, and as a Post-doctoral Research Scholar at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. As a tenure-track Assistant Professor, he then led the Laboratory of Health Econometrics in the Signature Program for Health Services and Systems Research at Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore while being Assistant Director for Education in the Program. Marcel has joined the Vienna University of Economics and Business in October 2018 as the new Head of the Health Economics and Policy Group.



During his career, Marcel has published in leading journals in health economics, health services research, and medicine as well as a book on health equity and financial protection. He is deeply passionate about the equity and sustainability of health systems. His work also includes the study of modifiable health risk factors such as obesity, lack of physical activity, and non-adherence to medications. In his new position, he now aims at offering innovative courses in health economics and policy in close partnership with the healthcare industry. His research objectives include developing a new framework that will consider both efficiency and equity considerations in efforts to guide health policymaking in Austria and internationally. His ultimate goal is to contribute to health equity and to the strengthening of health systems, while simultaneously training the next generation of leaders.

#### **Sophie Guthmuller, Assistant Professor**



Sophie Guthmuller holds a Ph.D. in Economics with a specialization in Health Economics from Paris Dauphine University. During her doctoral studies, she completed the International Doctoral Program in Health Economics and Policy from the Swiss School of Public Health+. After her Ph.D. and thanks to this expertise, Sophie has worked on several health econometrics projects and various economic evaluation projects within multi-disciplinary and international research teams. First as Postdoctoral Fellow at the Bordeaux School of Public Health (ISPED) in France, then as Research Fellow in the Academic Unit of Health Economics of the University of Leeds in the UK. Finally, as Economic Analyst at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, she has particularly applied her expertise in public policy evaluation methods at the European level.

Sophie has joined the Vienna University of Economics and Business in October 2020 as tenure track Assistant Professor in the Health Economics and Policy Group. Since October 2020, she is also part of the RWI Research Network <https://www.rwi-essen.de/en/forschung-beratung/weitere/rwi-research-network/team>. Her research has led to papers published in French and international peer-reviewed journals, and was granted two PhD prizes. Her research interests include health economics, public policy evaluation and applied econometrics. In 2025, Sophie was awarded the Dr. Maria Schaumayer Scholarship for her habilitation project "Disease prevention measures and education policies: Essays on their effectiveness and their impact on spatial and socioeconomic inequalities."

### **Daniela Weber, Research Assistant Professor**



With an academic background spanning technical mathematics (degree equivalent to a master's from the Vienna University of Technology), statistics (master's degree from the University of Vienna), and social and economic sciences (doctorate from Vienna University of Economics and Business), Daniela Weber combines rigorous quantitative methods with policy-relevant research on how societies age and how inequalities shape health trajectories across the life course.

Her work focuses on cognitive and physical ageing, mental health, gender and socioeconomic inequalities, and the future sustainability of health and care systems. Drawing on large-scale international and longitudinal datasets, she investigates how education, work, retirement, and living conditions influence healthy ageing across Europe and beyond. Her research has contributed to global debates on population ageing, health equity, and sustainable social policy, with publications in leading interdisciplinary journals including PNAS, Scientific Reports, and The Journals of Gerontology.

At WU Vienna, she led the "Aging Health Capital" project funded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) through the prestigious APART-GSK programme. At the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), where she serves as Senior Research Scholar, Daniela Weber leads the "Cognitive Health in Aging Society (CHIAS)" project funded by the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF). Through her research on cognitive health, ageing societies, and long-term care inequalities, she bridges academic excellence and real-world impact, providing evidence for policymakers navigating the demographic transformations of the 21st century.

### **Viktoria Szenkurök, PhD Student (graduated in October 2025)**

Viktoria Szenkurök joined the Health Economics and Policy (HEP) Group at the Vienna University of Economics and Business in November 2020 as a Teaching and Research Associate. Her research focuses on (long-term) care, particularly in relation to socioeconomic inequalities in the need for and access to care, the working conditions and wages of care workers, as well as the effects of an aging population. In her dissertation project she addressed the use and provision of informal and formal long-term care within- and between-country heterogeneities. Next to her role at HEP, Viktoria Szenkurök worked for the Austrian Institute for Economic Research (WIFO) to work on a joint project related to the political and demographic factors of long-term care needs and public costs in an ageing society. Viktoria defended her dissertation entitled "Within- and between-country heterogeneities in long-term care: providing insights from the perspective of users and providers" in October 2025.



### **Susanne Drexler, Doctoral Student**



Susanne Drexler joined the WU in July 2022 as a doctoral researcher. She works on PRÖMS, a third-party financed project in collaboration with the Austrian Social Health insurance (ÖGK) aimed at the development of an instrument for the routine collection of patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) and patient reported experience measures (PREMs) in primary care. Susanne completed an Erasmus Mundus Master in Health Economics and Management (MSc) with a specialisation in Global Health at the University of Oslo, the Erasmus University Rotterdam, and the University in Bologna in December 2021 and holds a Bachelor's degree in Scandinavian Studies from the University of Vienna. Before joining the HEP Group, Susanne worked as a research assistant at the Norwegian Institute for Public Health (FHI) and the Institute of

Advanced Studies (IHS) where she has contributed to several reports and publications. Her research interests include

health policy evaluation, health equity, and health system sustainability. Susanne is currently also a visiting researcher at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

### **Thomas Arnhold, PhD Student**

Thomas Arnhold is a Guest Researcher and PhD Candidate at the Health Economics and Policy Group. Since 2023, he has been working as a Researcher in the Social Cohesion, Health, and Wellbeing Research Group of the Population and Just Societies Program at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). He holds a Master's degree in Economics from WU. As part of the project Cognitive health in aging society – The role of context for cognitive functioning and related policy implications in Europe (CHIAS), his research focuses on context- and time-related inequalities in cognitive aging.



### **Lukas Hauder, Research Assistant**



Lukas Hauder is a Research Assistant at the Health Economics and Policy Group, currently working on the externally funded project PRÖMS. The aim of this project, carried out in close cooperation with the Austrian Health Insurance Fund (ÖGK), is to develop an instrument for the routine collection of patient-reported outcome and experience measures in primary care. Lukas' research interests include the effectiveness and efficiency of health policy prevention measures, the health impacts of socioeconomic inequalities and the evaluation of health data.

Before joining WU, Lukas worked at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Finance, Large Enterprises Tax Office, as a tax auditor. He studied Business and Economics (BSc) at WU and completed his Master's degree in Socioeconomics in 2021. In his Master's thesis, he examined how cross-country inequalities in health expenditure affect lung cancer mortality. In addition, he completed a semester abroad at NHH Norwegian School of Economics in Bergen, Norway and a postgraduate university course in Project Management at the University of Graz.

### **Zuzana Jiraskova, Research Assistant**

Zuzana Jiraskova is a student research assistant to Dr. Sophie Guthmuller in the Department of Health Economics and Policy. She is currently working on various projects, primarily focused on reproductive health. In addition to her research activities, she is assisting with the organization of the 33rd European Workshop on Econometrics and Health Economics (EWEHE) in 2026. Zuzana is pursuing a Master's degree in Socioeconomics at WU, where she previously earned her Bachelor's degree in Economics. She also spent a semester abroad at Humboldt University, Berlin and completed an internship at the European Court of Auditors in Luxembourg where she worked as a trainee auditor.



**Henriett Pálfi, Institute Manager, Institute for Social Policy**



Henriett Pálfi joined the WU in July 2025 as Institute Manager, providing dedicated support to the Institute for Social Policy and the Health Economics and Policy Group. She holds a Master's degree in English Language and Literature from Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary. Henriett brings extensive experience in academic program management, research administration, EU grant administration and international academic cooperation management, gained through her previous roles at Central European University, Grants Europe Consulting, and the Center for Social Sciences, in Hungary.

In her current role at WU, Henriett is responsible for the administrative and financial management of the Institute for Social Policy and the HEP group, overseeing budgets and HR processes, managing course administration and assisting the leadership of both units with strategic planning. Specifically within HEP, Henriett provides assistance with the administration of research projects and coordinates the admissions process for the Bachelor's specialization in Health and Social Policy.

**Susann Buchstab, Administrative Assistant**

Susann Buchstab holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Business Administration from Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Germany and earned a Master's degree in Socioeconomics from WU Vienna in June 2025. She arrived at HEP in November 2023 and supported the HEP Group as administrative assistant until December 2025.



**Anna Lochbihler, Administrative Assistant**

Anna Lochbihler holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, an MA in Gender Studies from the University of Vienna, and is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Socioeconomics at WU Vienna. She arrived at HEP in March, 2024 and is currently supporting the HEP Group as administrative assistant.

For more information and for the long-version CVs of all the members, please visit the HEP website:

<https://www.wu.ac.at/sozialpolitik/>

## **2.2 CHANGES IN PERSONNEL**

Henriett Pálfi joined WU as Institute Manager in July 2025.

Lukas Hauder joined HEP as Research Assistant in August 2025.

Zuzana Jiraskova joined HEP as Research Assistant in October 2025.

Susann Buchstab's Administrative Assistant position ended in December 2025.

## 3 RESEARCH

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The overarching objective of HEP's research effort is to generate new empirical results, methods, and theoretical frameworks that inform health policy making.

### 3.1 PUBLICATIONS

Gösenbauer, B., Braun, A., & **Bilger, M.** (2025). Informal long-term care and its gender distribution: a systematic review. *Journal of Integrated Care*, 33(5), 17-35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JICA-10-2024-0058>

**Szenkurök, V., Weber, D., & Bilger, M.** (2025). Informal and formal long-term care utilization and unmet needs in Europe: examining socioeconomic disparities and the role of social policies for older adults. *International Journal of Health Economics and Management*, 25(1), 87-106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10754-024-09378-z>

Klaus D., Lamura, M., **Bilger M.**, Haas B. (2025). [Support and employment preferences in online platform work: A cluster analysis of German-speaking workers](#). *International Journal of Social Welfare*. 34, 1, e12659

Famira-Mühlberger, U., Horvath, T., Leoni, T., Spielauer, M., **Szenkurök, V.**, & Warum, P. (2025). Demographic Change and the Future of Austria's Long-Term Care Allowance: A Dynamic Microsimulation Study. *WIFO Working Papers* No. 705 <https://www.wifo.ac.at/publication/pid/58707306>

Famira-Mühlberger, U., Horvath, T., Leoni, T., Spielauer, M., **Szenkurök, V.**, & Warum, P. (2025). Demographic Change and the Future of Austria's Long-Term-Care Allowance: A Dynamic Microsimulation Study. *Healthcare (Switzerland)*, 13(23). <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13233175>

**Arnhold, T., Szenkurök, V., & Weber, D.** (2025). Mapping inequalities in the health of older adults around the world: Heterogeneities in cognitive and physical functioning. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 23, 515-536. <https://doi.org/10.1553/p-mcm9-5b3b>

Umansky, K., **Weber, D.**, & Lutz, W. (2025). Revisiting the role of education in attitudes toward immigration in different contexts in Europe. *Genus*, 81(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-024-00238-9>

Zniva, R., & **Weber, D.** (2025). Indeed a 'silver bullet' – improving the measurement of ageing in consumer behaviour using the characteristic age approach. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1-41. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2025.2559922>

Licker L. V., **Guthmuller S.**, Wübker A. (2025). Dementia Severity, Informal Caregiving and Labour Market Outcomes in Europe, *Ruhr Economic Papers* #1190. RGS, RUB, RWI [https://www.rwi-essen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RWI/Publicationen/Ruhr Economic Papers/REP\\_25\\_1190.pdf](https://www.rwi-essen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/RWI/Publicationen/Ruhr_Economic_Papers/REP_25_1190.pdf)

**Guthmuller S.**, Carrieri V., Wübker A. (2025, 04 November 2025). Direct and Indirect Effects of Cancer Screening Invitations on Participation in Europe: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis. PREPRINT (Version 1) available at *Research Square* <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-7891986/v1>

Cassarà F., Brown H., **Guthmuller S.** (2025, 11 September 2025). Inequalities in abortion rates and accessibility to abortion services in England and Wales – a spatial analysis for 2017-2021. PREPRINT (Version 1) available at *Research Square* <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-7102487/v1>

Brown H., **Guthmuller, S.** (2025, 14 March 2025). Socioeconomic Inequalities in Live Births for Women Using Assisted Reproductive Technology: Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey 2009-2022. Available at *SSRN*: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5173992> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5173992>

## 3.2 ACTIVE RESEARCH GRANTS

### Aging Health Capital

This project investigated the development of health capital in older age from an international and life-course perspective.

**Weber D. (PI).** Aging Health Capital: Evolution of physical and cognitive health over the life course from an international perspective. APART-GSK-Stipend by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (410,000€ for 4 years).

Using harmonized longitudinal panel surveys on health and ageing from Europe, the United States, and Asia, the project examined how cognitive and physical functioning as well as the prevalence of non-communicable diseases evolve across later life, with particular attention to the social, economic, behavioural, and environmental determinants of healthy ageing.

To achieve this, eleven harmonized ageing surveys covering 41 countries were processed and combined with regional and national contextual indicators. Applying advanced quantitative and longitudinal methods to internationally comparable data, the project generated new evidence on how education, labour market participation, family structures, gender equality, environmental exposures, and institutional arrangements shape cognitive and physical health trajectories in older

populations.

The project produced important scientific contributions to research on healthy ageing, cognitive health, and health inequalities, highlighting substantial international disparities in health capital and the importance of contextual and life-course factors for healthy ageing outcomes. Beyond its scientific contribution, the project strengthened international and interdisciplinary collaborations and laid the foundation for successful acquisition of additional third-party funding, including the WWTF-funded "Cognitive Health in Aging Society (CHIAS)" project.

Funded through the prestigious APART-GSK programme of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OEAW), the project was successfully completed in 2025 and resulted in nine peer-reviewed scientific journal articles within the four-year project period, alongside additional manuscripts under review at highly ranked international journals.

### HPV vaccine and its contributions to cervical cancer prevention in the Netherlands

**Guthmuller, S. (PI),**  
O'Donnell O., Van  
Ourti, T., Wouterse, B.  
WU Project 2023 incl.  
Research stay at  
Erasmus University  
Rotterdam (17,000€  
for 1 year)

This research project aims at studying and quantifying the causal effects of two public health programs implemented in the Netherlands to eliminate cervical cancer: a free access to human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for children and young adults, and regular screening invitations for adults within an organized screening program (OSP). Socioeconomic inequalities in screening and vaccination participation will be studied, as well as the interactions between mother and daughter decisions on cervical cancer prevention. The results of this research will provide robust evidence on the causal effects of these programs and help policy makers in the Netherlands, and in other countries with similar programs, to make informed choices on these two programs. More broadly, they will contribute to the knowledge on cancer prevention measures and vaccine hesitancy.

### PRÖMS: PREMs and PROMs in outpatient care

This is a third-party financed project in collaboration with the Austrian Social Health Insurance (ÖGK) aimed at the development of a survey for the routine collection of patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) and patient reported experience measures (PREMs) in Austrian outpatient care. Currently, the patient perspective is not included in care planning in Austria and existing PREM and PROM instruments do not address the patient-system relationship. The final survey will be implemented digitally and create a continuous feedback loop from patients to ÖGK supporting the ultimate aim of improving Austrian outpatient care. Other results of this project, such as use of PREMs and PROMs in primary care, will be relevant for payers, policy makers, and decision makers in other jurisdictions.

**Bilger M. (Co-PI),**  
Kiss, N. (Co-PI).  
PROMS-/PREMS-  
Instrument. Funded  
by Austrian Social  
Health insurance  
(ÖGK) (337,000€  
until 2026).

## Spatial and Temporal Analysis of Parental Job Loss Effects on Children's Educational Outcomes: A Study in Vienna

Recent research has shed light on various aspects of the relationship between parental job loss and children's educational outcomes.

Despite the wealth of research on this topic, as pointed out by Ruiz-Valenzuela (2021) more studies are needed, particularly on whether the timing of job loss matters. Furthermore, existing studies have largely overlooked the spatial dimensions of this phenomenon, leaving unanswered questions about how spatial dependencies may influence the impact of job loss on education. The goal of this research project is to analyze the causal impact of parental job loss on the educational outcomes of their children by replying to the following questions: Does parental job loss increase educational disparities? Does parental job loss impact long-term educational outcomes? Does the spatial distribution of parental job loss exacerbate educational inequalities? Do characteristics of peer students have spillover effects on neighboring students' educational outcomes?

**Guthmuller, S. (PI), Auerbach, R.** Spatial and Temporal Analysis of Parental Job Loss Effects on Children's Educational Outcomes: A Study in Vienna. Funded by Jubiläumsfond of the city of Vienna (19,000€ for 2 years)

## Dr. Maria Schaumayer-Habilitationsstipendium Guthmuller

**Guthmuller, S.**  
Maria Schaumayer  
Habilitationstipendium  
Funded by OeNB  
(70,000€ for 1 year)

"Disease prevention measures and education policies: Essays on their effectiveness and their impact on spatial and socioeconomic inequalities"

The aim of the scholarship is to promote women scientists in the field of social and economic sciences, thereby enabling them to work continuously on the habilitation project by relieving them of the general teaching and administrative activities. The scholarship can be used for work that occurs at the beginning of a habilitation as well as for the completion of a habilitation. The Dr. Maria-Schaumayer-Habilitation Scholarship is awarded for a period of one year.

## Rebuilding (My) Trust in Healthcare: A Mixed-Methods Study and Theatre-Performance About Trust Erosion and Its Repair in Finland

Trust in Finland's healthcare system is eroding – and with it, the health and wellbeing of those who rely on it most. When trust in healthcare falters, it can cascade into broader discontentment with public institutions, decreasing democratic participation. Drawing upon social organization theory, we conceptualize trust as system or institutional trust, meaning the trust citizens place in public institutions responsible for healthcare provision. This interdisciplinary project confronts the ongoing trust erosion in Finland head-on. How does trust in healthcare break – and what can rebuild it? We explore the question scientifically and artistically through a mixed-methods study and a documentary theater performance. We invite society not only to observe, but to participate in all processes that seek the answer. Diverse perspectives across gender, age, socioeconomic position, health status, rural vs. urban residence, and ethnic background are captured by artistic and scientific methods. Factors contributing to trust erosion and rebuilding are identified

**Drexler, S.** Project and personal funding for "Rebuilding (my) trust in healthcare: a mixed-methods study and theatre performance about trust erosion and its repair in Finland"  
Funder: Kone Foundation (357,400 €)

through 25 problem-centered interviews. Those interviews inform a questionnaire quantifying the prevalence of identified factors and inspire the writing process of a documentary theatre play. Videos we shoot following the patient journey provide insights unattainable with scientific methods, act as input for scientific data collection and as material used on stage. Through theatre, we want scientific findings to reach a wider audience and sparking public dialogue between citizens and the system meant to serve them. During the theater performances the audience participates organically through voting and opportunities to express themselves. Public discussions follow the performance, fostering mutual understanding between citizens and invited policymakers. Reflecting upon each other while carrying shared elements, this united artistic and scientific approach will initiate a unique social dialogue about trust.

### Adverse Health Outcomes in Patients with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD): The Role of Primary Care Attendance in Avoidable Hospitalizations and Mortality

#### **Drexler, S.**

Adverse health outcomes in patients with alcohol use disorder (AUD): The role of primary care attendance in avoidable hospitalizations and mortality

Funder: Finnish Alcohol Research Foundation  
(15,400€)

Although evidence-based guidelines for treating alcohol use disorder (AUD) and resulting comorbidities in primary care exist, this patient group is often underserved. Using nationwide Finnish register-data, this project will examine potential shortcomings in primary care delivery for people with AUD and associations between mortality and primary care attendance patterns. These insights will reveal if frequent usage of primary care services may serve as a warning sign for early mortality among people with AUD.

### 3.3 OTHER ONGOING RESEARCH PROJECTS

#### Budget Impact Analysis of Colorectal Screening Programs in Austria

This project aims at calculating the budget impact of various organized colorectal screening programs in Austria. The method is based on a Markov model partly informed by survey data from the Austrian National Health Examination Survey (ATHIS).

**HEP researchers involved:** Marcel Bilger and Sophie Guthmuller

**In collaboration with:** Österreichische Gesundheitskasse (ÖGK)

#### Cancer Screening, Diagnosis, and Mortality in Europe

Cancer is a major social issue in Western societies because of its high incidence and high mortality risk that particularly affects aging societies. The good side of the coin is that cancer is in many cases avoidable, and early detection is key to increase the chance of cure. For that reason, many countries in Europe introduced organised screening programmes

(OSP) for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer. However, there are large regional differences across Europe as to whether and when OSPs were introduced. We exploit these variations in this project to comprehensively evaluate OSP. The first OSPs in Europe date back to the 1980s and most of them are still active nowadays. However, after almost 40 years of implementation, a comprehensive evaluation of this policy is still missing. For instance, do OSPs have an impact on screening uptake? Do they reach the population at higher risk? Do OSPs help increasing early diagnoses and reducing mortality? Do OSPs impact inequality in healthcare use and health? This project aim is to fill this gap.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Sophie Guthmuller*

**In collaboration with:** *Vincenzo Carrieri (Magna Graecia University of Catanzaro) and Ansgar Wübker (RWI Essen, Hochschule Harz)*

### Cash-for-Care and Its Impact on Informal and Formal Long-Term Care: Evidence from Continental European Countries

Using SHARE data, this study provides novel insights on whether the receipt of cash-for-care (CFC) benefits promotes or displaces informal family or formal care, focusing on traditionally Conservative-corporatist Welfare States in Continental Europe (Austria, Belgium, France and Germany). Results reveal that, overall, CFC promotes informal caregiving, but this does not appear to be the case for formal care. However, country-specific differences were reported.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Viktoria Szenkurök*

### Effectiveness of Organized Programs on Colorectal Screening Uptake in Austria

This project aims at assessing the impact of organized colorectal screening programs on uptake in Austria. The methods used are interrupted times series, difference-in-difference, and regression discontinuity design that are applied to a large dataset of individual insurance claim data.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Marcel Bilger and Sophie Guthmuller*

**In collaboration with:** *Österreichische Gesundheitskasse (ÖGK)*

### Gaining Knowledge in the Relationship Between Air Pollution and Cognition at Older Age

In recent years the role of air pollution on health was researched with a particular focus on lung diseases, cardiovascular diseases or more recent dementia. However, the role of air pollution on cognitive functioning prior to developing a disease such as dementia is understudied. Here, we investigate the role of air pollution on European older adults' cognitive functioning.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Daniela Weber*

**In collaboration with:** *Researchers from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the IIASA in Laxenburg*

## Gender Gap in Unmet Needs for Care in Later Life: The Moderating Role of Social Deprivation

This study contributes to the inconclusive discourse on gender-related differences in unmet need for personal care by unveiling the moderating role of social deprivation among older adults in Europe. Using a uniquely comprehensive index including 12 items on poor living conditions, lack of (digital) literacy, neighborhood deprivation, exclusion from social relations and basic access to health care services, our results based on data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) across 15 countries in 2015 reveal that social deprivation, alongside potential material deprivation, is a key factor associated with an increased risk of unmet care needs among older women.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Viktoria Szenkurök, Daniela Weber*

## Gender Roles in European Societies - Cognitive Gender Differences

Research on gender differences in cognition has shown individual factors such as employment history or education associated with these gender differences. Moreover, there are mesolevel factors such as social norms that might influence men's and women's cognitive health differently. In this project we investigate the role of gender norms within a population on gender differences in older adults cognition.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Daniela Weber*

**In collaboration with:** *Researchers from University of Vienna – Sociology Department*

## Revisiting the 'Care Penalty' in the Portuguese Labour Market: Uncovering (Gender) Pay Differentials in Long-Term Care

Focusing on long-term care (LTC), the article analyses wages and earnings within caring sectors through competing frameworks, including theories of ageism, compensating wage differentials, and gender-based devaluation. To explore how these theories explain pay differentials in LTC, we use a multilevel model based on linked employer-employee data covering virtually all employees in Portugal's manufacturing and service sectors.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Viktoria Szenkurök*

**In collaboration with:** *Ricardo Rodrigues (ISEG, Lisbon, Portugal)*

## Dementia Severity, Informal Caregiving and Labour Market Outcomes in Europe

Dementia is associated with an increasing need for care, which is often provided by informal carers. This may have an impact on their behaviour in the labour market. This study analyses the impact of dementia severity on informal care, labour market participation and working hours of informal carers. We use data from the multinational RightTimePlaceCare (RTPC) study, which covers eight European countries and uniquely links detailed information on people with dementia and their primary informal carers. Using descriptive statistics and multivariate regression models, we analyse the relationships between the severity of dementia, the intensity of care and labour market outcomes, taking into account the endogeneity of care intensity through an instrumental variable approach.

**HEP researchers involved:** *Sophie Guthmuller*

**In collaboration with:** Luisa Licker (Leibniz University Hannover, Hochschule Harz), Ansgar Wuebker (RWI Essen, Hochschule Harz)

## Spatial and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Access to Reproductive Healthcare

Recent legal changes in access to reproductive health services in high-income countries, such as in Europe and the US raise concerns about their impact on maternal, newborn, and children health. Access to abortion services and medically assisted reproduction will be the focus of this research.

### **Spatial and socioeconomic inequalities in access to abortion services and abortion use:**

Inequalities in access to reproductive health care across Europe is an under-researched area. Reproductive health policies and access vary greatly across European countries. However, even where abortion care is legally granted as a right, formal and informal barriers are at work that reduce people's access to safe pregnancy terminations. This includes insufficient service provision, stigmatization of abortion, and information inaccessibility, among others (Culwell and Hurwitz 2013, Calkin and Berny 2021). Qualitative evidence suggests rurality, a social support network, and national language ability limit access to abortions for women. The specific objectives of this study are to explore: geographic differences in the availability of abortion services, geographic differences in abortion use, how the clustering of abortion services correlates with abortion use, socioeconomic differences and rurality at the regional level.

### **Spatial inequalities in access to medically assisted reproduction**

The issue of infertility, its treatment through medically assisted reproductive (MAR) technology, and family planning significantly impact social, economic, and political spheres. Thus, understanding how European countries approach regulation regarding medically assisted reproduction in light of the fundamental right to procreate is essential for addressing legal and ethical controversies surrounding reproductive healthcare. Legislation regarding access to MAR in European countries varies greatly in terms of funding sources and eligibility conditions related to age limits, relationship status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and third-party involvement (Calhaz-Jorge, De Geyter et al. 2020). This part of the research project aims to study the determinants of access to MAR, the use of IVF treatment, and successful pregnancy with IVF, in particular, the role of public funding.

**HEP researchers involved:** Sophie Guthmuller

**In collaboration with:** Heather Brown (Lancaster University), Federico Cassarà (WU), Xu Peng (Hochschule Harz)

## The Effect of a Social Education Grant on Academic Success: Evidence from Portugal

This project studies the impact of the higher education grant system for less privileged students in Portugal on academic success. Thanks to administrative data on the applicants, linked with data on students' academic situation, we are able to reconstruct the full academic history of these students. Eligibility to the higher education grant is conditioned on having resources below a threshold. We adopt a regression discontinuity approach based on this exogenous assignment rule to measure the impact of the grant on various outcomes measuring academic success.

The project has been completed at the end of 2025. A publication is forthcoming in 2026: Guthmuller, S., & Meroni, E. C. (2026). The impact of need-based aid on higher education achievement: Evidence from Portugal. *Economics of Education Review*, 110, 102752. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2025.102752>

**HEP researchers involved:** Sophie Guthmuller

**In collaboration with:** Elena Meroni (Joint Research Centre, European Commission)

### 3.4 SCIENTIFIC PRESENTATIONS AND RESEARCH VISITS

**Marcel Bilger**, Health in the Digital Economy: Unclouding Inequalities Among Online Platform Workers. 16th IHEA World Congress on Health Economics, Bali, Indonesia, July 19-23, 2025

**Susanne Drexler**, Willingness to Share Patient-Reported Measures in Austria: A Mixed-Methods Study. 8th ATHEA (Austrian Health Economics Association) Conference, Vienna, Austria, March 6-7, 2025

**Susanne Drexler**, The role of trust in sharing patient-reported outcome measures for research: a mixed-methods study. 18th European Public Health Conference Helsinki 2025, Helsinki, Finland, November 11-14, 2025

**Susanne Drexler**, „Qualitätsvertrag zur Zukunft der stationären Versorgung der therapieresistenten Depression mit intensivierter Hirnstimulation“. BMC-Kongress 2025, Berlin, January 28-29, 2025

**Thomas Arnhold**, Employment Histories and Cognition at Older Age in the Context of Different European Welfare Regimes. 8th ATHEA (Austrian Health Economics Association) Conference, Vienna, Austria, March 6-7, 2025

**Thomas Arnhold**, Exploring heterogeneities in cognitive functioning at older age: The role of employment histories across European welfare regimes.. 36th REVES Conference, Tampere, Finland, May 14-16, 2025

**Viktoria Szenkurök**, The 'Care Penalty' in the Portuguese Labour Market: Examining Pay Differentials in Long-Term Care. 8th ATHEA (Austrian Health Economics Association) Conference, Vienna, Austria, March 6-7, 2025

**Viktoria Szenkurök**, The 'Care Penalty' in the Portuguese Labour Market: Examining Pay Differentials in Long-Term Care. Transforming Care Conference 2025, Helsinki, Finland, June 25-27, 2025

**Daniela Weber**, Gender Gap in Unmet Need for Care in Later Life: The Moderating Role of Social Deprivation. 8th ATHEA (Austrian Health Economics Association) Conference, Vienna, Austria, March 6-7, 2025

**Daniela Weber**, Sex differences in cognition among older adults and the role of digital exclusion: Evidence from European countries. 1st International Conference of the Sustainable Ageing EAPS Working Group, Padova, Italy, September 11-12, 2025.

**Daniela Weber**, Breathing Clean Air, Remembering Better: A Cross-Regional Study of Air Quality and Episodic Memory in European Older Adults. EGU25, Vienna, April 28-May 2, 2025.

### **3.5 PEER-REVIEWS FOR ACADEMIC JOURNALS**

- Age and Ageing
- BMC Public Health
- Frontiers in Public Health
- Health Economics
- Journal of Aging and Health
- Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization
- Journal of Health Economics
- Vienna Yearbook of Population Research
- Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
- Swiss National Science Foundation (Grant Proposal)

### **3.6 GUEST RESEARCHERS AT HEP**

Noémi Kiss, Österreichische Gesundheitskasse (ÖGK), ongoing research collaboration

## 4 TEACHING

HEP's teaching philosophy consists in developing the understanding of key health economic concepts, fostering the ability to apply health economic theory to real life situations, and creating skills that are directly relevant to the industry.

### 4.1 COURSES

The HEP team teaches approximately 16 hours per week on average at all academic levels. At the Bachelor's level, HEP, in collaboration with the Institute for Social Policy, offers a 5-course Specialization that is open to 30 students each semester enrolled from three different programs: Business and Economics, Business Law, and Business, Economics, and Social Sciences. This Specialization in Health and Social Policy enables the Group to teach health economics and policy within a broader interdisciplinary perspective and to reach a larger number of students. The specialization receives 130-150 applications/semester and due to its popularity, its capacity is currently being increased to accept more Bachelor's students. The individual courses also attract many exchange students from other universities, giving the specialization a global mindset.

The table below summarizes HEP's teaching portfolio. More detail on each course offered can be found in the WU course catalogue (<https://learn.wu.ac.at/vvz/>).

Course	Program	HEP Lecturer(s)	Semester
<b>Economics and Policy of the Public Healthcare Industry</b>	Bachelor's Specialization in Health and Social Policy (Course II)	Viktoria Szenkurök	SS 2025 WS 2025/26
<b>Economics and Policy of the Private Healthcare Industry</b>	Bachelor's Specialization in Health and Social Policy (Course III)	Marcel Bilger Alexander Braun <sup>b</sup>	SS 2025 WS 2025/26
<b>Social Policy Evaluation<sup>a</sup></b>	Bachelor's Specialization in Health and Social Policy (Course V)	Sophie Guthmuller Péter Balázs <sup>b</sup> Zsuzsanna Beretzky <sup>b</sup>	SS 2025 WS 2025/26
<b>Health and Sustainable Aging</b>	Bachelor's in Business, Economics, and Social Sciences	Daniela Weber	SS 2025 WS 2025/2026
<b>Interdisciplinary Socioeconomic Research Lab I: Quantitative Research in Social Policy<sup>a</sup></b>	Master's in Socioeconomics	Marcel Bilger Ulrike Schneider	WS 2025/26
<b>Interdisciplinary Socioeconomic Research Lab II: Quantitative Research in Social Policy<sup>a</sup></b>	Master's in Socioeconomics	Marcel Bilger, Ulrike Schneider	SS 2025
<b>Applied Socioeconomic Theories and Methods</b>	Master's in Socioeconomics	Marcel Bilger,	SS 2025 WS 2025/26

<sup>a</sup> Taught in collaboration with the Institute for Social Policy.

<sup>b</sup> External lecturers.

## 4.2 EXAMINATIONS, AND THESIS SUPERVISIONS

### Ph.D. and Doctoral theses supervised

- Schneider, Peter. *Pharmaceutical Policy for High-Priced and Innovative Medicines*, WU Doctoral Program in Social and Economic Sciences (completed).
- Szenkurök, Viktoria. *Socioeconomic Inequalities in Long-Term Care*. WU Ph.D. Program in Economics and Social Sciences (completed).
- Arnhold, Thomas. *Cognitive Health, Work and Retirement in an Aging Society*. WU Ph.D. Program in Economics and Social Sciences (ongoing).
- Drexler, Susanne. *Socioeconomic and Policy Evaluation of Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) and patient reported experience measures (PREMs) in Austrian outpatient care*, WU Doctoral Program in Social and Economic Sciences (ongoing).
- Koisser, Lea. *Essays on the Effect of Cardiac Rehabilitation* (ongoing).
- Gösenbauer, Barbara. *Socioeconomic Analysis of Quality and Cost of Outpatient and Hospitalized Long-Term Care in Austria*, WU Doctoral Program in Social and Economic Sciences (ongoing).
- Paterno, Nathanael. *Economics and Financing of Gene Therapies*, WU Doctoral Program in Social and Economic Sciences (ongoing).

### Master's theses supervised

- Pilmes, Luca Andreas: *Influence of the National Gross Diesel Price Index on Agricultural and Food Price Indices along the Value Chain in Austria - A Time-Series Analysis using a VAR-Model*. Master Sozioökonomie. (completed)
- Lechner, Stephan: *Impact of the Announcement Until Implementation of Brexit on the United Kingdom Healthcare Workforce Using the Synthetic Control Group Method*. Masters in Economics. (completed)
- Kinner, Maurice: *Occupational Risks in a Warming Climate: An Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Heatwaves on Occupational Accident Rates in Austria Between 2010 & 2019*. Master Sozioökonomie. (completed)
- Iby, Christoph: *Social Inequalities Amplify Health Disparities: Evidence from Germany*. Master Sozioökonomie. (in progress)
- Schüle, Noah Julian: *Heatwaves and Excess Mortality in Austria: Distributional Patterns Across Population Groups and Federal States*. Master Sozioökonomie. (in progress)
- Auerbach, Robert: *The Impact of Parental Job Loss on Children's Educational Outcomes*. Masters in Economics. (in progress)
- Savasci, Adriana: *Breast Cancer Screening - A Qualitative Study of (Non)-Take-Up in Vienna*. Master Sozioökonomie. (in progress)
- Haintz, Gabriel Alexander: *Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Social Class*. Master Sozioökonomie. (in progress)

## Bachelor's theses supervised

- Lashova, Adelina Petrova: *Determinants of Vaccination Uptake: A Comparative Review of Preventive Care Utilization in the UK and Germany*. Bachelor in Business and Economics. (completed)
- Schwarzmaier, Clemens Stephan: *Vorzeitige Mortalität durch kardiovaskuläre Erkrankungen und Krebs im internationalen Vergleich - Der Einfluss von Wohlfahrtsstaatsregimen, Gesundheitsverhalten und Gesundheitssystem*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (complete)
- Sagmüller, Paul: *Optimierung der Ressourcenallokation in der Intensivmedizin*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Wastler, Katharina: *Auswirkungen von Luftverschmutzung auf die Gesundheit sozial benachteiligter Gruppen in Österreich*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Gavrilovic, Ljiljana: *Psychische Belastungen bei Schüler\*innen der Sekundarstufe I - eine analyse struktureller Risikofaktoren im österreichischen Schulsystem*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Himberger, Alina: *Langzeitpflegekosten in Österreich: finanzielle Herausforderungen und Perspektiven im demografischen Kontext*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (complete)
- Koletti, Elissavet: *How Do Institutional Factors Influence Smoking Related Cancer Prevention, Incidence and Outcomes*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Ayaz, Mehmet: *Weighing the Gains: A Comparative Analysis of Weight Training vs. Calisthenics on Public Health Outcomes*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Nikcevic, Naomi: *Sozioökonomische Determinanten der physischen Gesundheit: Ein Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Schweden*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Wöß, Lena Marie: *Strategische Patentierungsmaßnahmen in der Pharmaindustrie: Auswirkungen auf generische Wettbewerber und regulatorische Maßnahmen zur Förderung des Markteintritts*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (completed)
- Nagy, Emese: *Systematic Applications of Lung Cancer Screening and Possibilities in Austria*. International Business Administration. (completed)
- Celik, Feyza: *Zugang zu psychischen Gesundheitsdiensten in Österreich: sozioökonomische und geografische Ungleichheiten*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (in progress)
- Grain, Markus Robert: *Austria's Path Out of the Ashes. Austria's Tobacco Policy and Prevalence Throughout the Recent History*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (in progress)
- Bedi, Sunali: *Long-Term Care Prevention as a Future Strategy: A Health Economic and Policy Perspective*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (in progress)
- Lehki, Anemari: *The Effect of Exposure to Small-Scale Urban Green Spaces on Mental Well-Being in Young Adults*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (in progress)
- Gugele, Svenja Tabea: *COVID-19 and Access to Abortion*. Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences. (in progress)

## 5 OUTREACH

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HEP aims to network with the healthcare industry and academic researchers, communicate its research results and engage with the public through its outreach activities. In 2025, the team conducted the following outreach activities:

### ASEP Health

Marcel Bilger is member of the health working group for the new Austrian Socio-Economic Panel (ASEP).

Marcel Bilger is Member of the Extended Board of Directors of the Austrian Health Economics Association (ATHEA) since January 2024.

### ATHEA

### Erasmus School of Health Policy and Management

Sophie Guthmuller worked at the Erasmus School of Health Policy and Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands from September 2024 to February 2025. This research stay was funded by a research contract from WU Vienna.

### Frontiers in Public Health

Daniela Weber is an editorial board member of *Frontiers in Public Health* in the section Aging and Public Health since 2023.

Sophie Guthmuller is a Member of the Platform „RegisterForschung.at“ to promote access to administrative data to researchers and the creation of the Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC).

### Register Forschung.at

### WHO

Daniela Weber is a Member of the “WHO Consortium on Metrics and Evidence for Healthy Ageing”, which aims at reviewing and suggesting metrics for healthy ageing within the framework of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030.

## CONTACT

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