



Gaps in social citizenship in Europe: Why do they matter?

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EUROSHIP Policy Brief no. 1 - June 2020

INTRODUCTION

The EUROSHIP project (2020 - 2023) aims to provide original and gender-sensitive assessment of the current gaps in social protection against poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Through the involvement of national and European stakeholders, EUROSHIP will develop policy recommendations on how to strengthen social citizenship at the national and EU levels. The research results will support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

EUROSHIP will capture EU citizens' narratives and experiences, focusing especially on women and men with low education and low income. The project puts into sharp focus the opportunities, challenges and responses citizens encounter in the face of rapid policy transformations of social protection systems in different institutional and societal contexts.

To understand how these above-mentioned challenges are unfolding, the research team will:

1. Examine the social protection systems, including the role of minimum income schemes;
2. Focus on the experiences of three vulnerable population groups (youth at risk of in-work poverty, prime-age precarious workers with care obligations, and low-income persons with disabilities, including older people with long-term care needs);
3. Interrogate the implications of introducing digital technologies to deliver social protection systems and address some of the problems arising from the digitalisation of the labour market; and
4. Analyse how the EU may contribute to close current gaps in social citizenship in a multilevel and territorially diverse Europe.

Providing a more nuanced understanding of the gaps in social citizenship and the barriers to realization of it, the team will address the interplay of different dimensions of inequality such as

gender, class, age, ethnicity and disability for all three age groups (youth, prime age and older citizens).

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

While the concept of social citizenship has been used to describe the relationship between the citizens and public institutions in terms of the provision of social protection, EUROSHIP relies on a broader conceptualisation of social citizenship, not only as a question of entitlement but also as participation in public and societal life. EUROSHIP will examine the opportunities for women and men with low education and income to exercise social citizenship: to maintain a sense of security, exercise choice, and participate in public deliberation and decision-making processes of importance to themselves and society as a whole.

EUROSHIP aims to identify factors or conditions that currently prevent or discourage women and men with low education and income from exercising social citizenship, and more positively, to identify means or effective policies that enable them to mitigate risks of poverty and social exclusion over the life-course.

A majority of the social policy literature has ignored how human diversity in needs and conditions for participating in society affect the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Providing a more nuanced understanding than in previous social policy studies, an integral aim across EUROSHIP is to examine the effects of combinations of multiple sources of marginalisation and social exclusion (e.g. gender, age, disability, class, and ethnicity) in the deliberation, implementation and take up of social rights.

The EUROSHIP team will identify policy lessons from seven European countries (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom) and the EU-level. The seven countries provide very different socio-economic and institutional conditions for realizing social citizenship across Europe. Acknowledging the current social, economic and political diversity among European countries, EUROSHIP will assess the policy instruments available at the EU level in promoting upward social convergence, social resilience and social cohesion across Europe.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EUROSHIP will produce better and more informed understanding of gaps in social citizenship. An improved understanding of the current gaps will be a valuable tool for developing research-based recommendations for improved policies. This new knowledge will stimulate stakeholders' awareness of the need for appropriate systems for deliberation, implementation, coordination and monitoring of social policies, both at national and EU levels, and hence contribute to the overall impact of the EUROSHIP project.

The findings will improve the knowledge base necessary to formulate evidence-based and innovative policy options to help the EU and national governments boost social citizenship for individuals facing risks of poverty and social exclusion. Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic highlights that social policy cannot be adequately addressed without considering the social and

economic impact of the pandemic for these vulnerable population groups. So far, these groups seem to be among the hardest hit by the crisis. EUROSHIP will thus include this aspect in the research activities, by monitoring the social policy responses to and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the vulnerable population groups in the seven European countries where data are to be collected. With substantial contributions from the stakeholder committees at national and European levels, including government representatives, civil servants, politicians, social partners and civil society organizations, EUROSHIP will develop proposals for effective policies and inform relevant policymakers with a view to maximizing the project's impact from both a societal and scientific perspective.

Through its expected results in the form of new knowledge about social risks and gaps in citizens' actual opportunities to make use of different forms of social protection, EUROSHIP has strong potential to generate long-term benefits –for individuals facing different social and economic vulnerabilities and for European societies as a whole. Such knowledge is important in light of Europe's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goals 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere), 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), and 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries).

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Since EUROSHIP aims to highlight changes over time, the main primary data source will be a set of coordinated semi-structured life-course interviews with women and men with low education and low income. Interviews with women and men from three different generations (born around 1950-1955, 1975-1980 and 1990-1995) will allow us to examine the historical changes in opportunities for exercising social citizenship, as reflected in the narratives of the individuals. Using a common topic guide, the team plans to interview four to five women and four to five men in each age cohort in each of the seven countries in which the project team will collect data (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom), i.e. ca 210 interviews in total. The life-course perspective will allow the researchers to analyse the lived experiences of women and men in their exercise of social citizenship in different stages of life.

Additionally, EUROSHIP will organize focus forums with stakeholder representatives in each of the seven countries. The focus forums will involve national and local stakeholder organizations as co-researchers in the project. The focus forums will provide data on citizens' opportunities for influence and involvement in the deliberation and enforcement of social rights through labour organizations and civil society organizations.

The life-course interviews and focus forums will be complemented by reviewing existing studies and documents, reanalysing existing statistical data and conducting interviews with other relevant informants at the national and EU-levels (e.g. policy experts from the government, labour and civil society organisations).

Innovation in social protection policy is more likely to be achieved when experience and research-based knowledge is combined. EUROSHIP benefits from a partnership with a European Stakeholder

Committee as well as National Stakeholder Committees in each of the seven countries the project team will collect data (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom). The European Stakeholder Committee includes members from the AGE Platform Europe, COFACE Families Europe, European Anti-Poverty Network, European Trade Union Confederation, European Youth Forum, the International Labour Union and the European Commission.

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE	Closing gaps in social citizenship: New tools to foster social resilience in Europe (EUROSHIP)
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FUNDING SCHEME	European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under Grant Agreement No. 870698
DURATION	February 2020 – January 2023 (36 Months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: EUR 3 Mill.
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The project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870698. The opinions reflect the authors' views only. The Research Executive Agency and the European Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.