

Integrating Diversity in the European Union

Results in Brief

Charting the many paths to integration with the EU


A process that allows Member States to adopt EU rules at their own speed has produced a complex and evolving state of regulatory alignment. A pioneering data set captures this multifaceted progress to integration, including which policies proved the most difficult to embrace.





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For a variety of reasons, nations joining the EU may decide to integrate more slowly in certain areas. The concept of [differentiated integration](#)  (DI) covers formal and informal arrangements for policy opt-outs as well as the differences, or discretionary aspects, associated with putting EU policy into practice.

To help policymakers get a handle on what differentiation exists and how it has evolved, the EU-supported [InDivEU](#)  (Integrating Diversity in the European Union) project has created a comprehensive data set tracking all instances of DI in EU treaties and EU legislation from the Treaty of Rome in 1958 to 2020.

“The European Union today is characterised by diversities that run deep and it must find ways of managing and governing that. One way to addressing diversity is DI, as it enables the EU to integrate further,” says Brigid Laffan, one of the co-directors of the InDivEU project based at the [European University Institute](#)  in Italy.


Economy and identity

There are two forms of DI: internal differentiation, which is where Member States do not participate in all EU policy regimes, and external differentiation, which involves third countries participating selectively. It's a complex area with a range of differentiation types and durations.

The application of DI falls into two main categories: economic limitations that may render Member States unable to participate in all policy regimes, and ideological differences that may make them unwilling to participate in all EU policy regimes.

The project's data set shows that Denmark has the largest number of opt-outs, and that France and Germany, the two big, 'core' countries of the EU, tend not to resort to DI.

"Willing new Member States that were excluded from several EU policies initially have been able to join the EU 'core' in a reasonable period," explains Frank Schimmelfennig, who also co-directed the project.

The InDivEU also gathered policymakers, civil servants, academics, journalists and other representatives from seven EU Member States for a [series of Stakeholder Forums](#)  in selected EU capitals. These workshops generated key insights on the challenges and opportunities of DI.

The information collected by InDivEU provides important insights into the governance of the EU. The project's message for policymakers is that internal DI works best for new Member States who may be adjusting to their accession, or at the launch of new policies. It is less suitable when applied to European values or financial redistribution across Member States. These last are of course the key challenges the EU faces.

Mapping integration

"The data set is an authoritative one-stop source on the development of DI over 50 years and thus invaluable to policymakers as it captures absolute numbers of DI and trends," Laffan adds.

It shows that the instances of DI in EU treaties and legislation grew significantly after the 2004 enlargement, when 10 new Member States joined. The data set also shows that internal DI is multi-speed: two thirds of examples have already expired, while others persist.

This is important as it means that most instances of DI are time-bound, and that Member States eventually come on board. However, the remaining one third relates

to major policy fields, such as the adoption of the euro. “In this case the differentiation has become entrenched in response to the euro area crisis,” Laffan explains. The data suggest that DI has contributed to European integration by making it easier for key sticking points to be forestalled.

Keywords

InDivEU

diversity

governance

differentiated integration

internal differentiation

external differentiation

data set

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Project Information

InDivEU

Grant agreement ID: 822304

[Project website](#)

DOI

[10.3030/822304](https://doi.org/10.3030/822304)

Project closed

EC signature date

5 November 2018

Start date

1 January 2019

End date

31 December 2021

Funded under

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES - Europe In A Changing World - Inclusive, Innovative And Reflective Societies

Total cost

€ 3 132 250,50

EU contribution

€ 3 000 000,00

Coordinated by

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE



Italy

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European Union, 2025