

## European societies after the crisis

Specific Challenge: The crisis has strongly impacted European societies. Many people lost their jobs or part of their income as a result of salary cuts. Uncertainty about the future has risen. European citizens demonstrate an increasing lack of confidence and trust in relation to the governance of financial institutions, companies and the free market overall but also in relation to democratic institutions and politics at European, national or local levels. At the same time, the crisis has pushed the EU to advance the integration process in order to make the European economy more resilient and sustainable.

The fall of trust and confidence caused various antagonisms to (re-)emerge, both between European nations and ethnic groups, as inter alia evidenced by the rise of populist movements and parties. This has highlighted the urgency to find 'Unity in Diversity', posing a challenge, which requires apart from innovative political and governmental responses, a reflective reappraisal of Europe's intellectual foundation. Whilst the EU celebrates its (cultural) diversity as a defining feature, this very diversity is also frequently regarded as an impediment to the formation of a meaningful European identity as well as a European public sphere.

Social protection and inclusion policies are also undergoing continuous reform in the light of financial pressures as well as of governance changes. The distribution of responsibilities between private actors, public actors as well as the third sector is shifting and being reorganised, which may have a significant impact on citizens, arousing further public discontent. The Social Investment Package, adopted by the European Commission on 20 February 2013, provides an integrated strategic framework for social policy reform and the modernisation of social protection systems and services, structured around a social investment approach. This should help individuals, families and society at large to adapt to current and future societal challenges and should help Member States to use their social budgets more effectively and efficiently.

Scope: The research to address this challenge should in particular focus on the following key dimensions (proposals do not need to cover all dimensions and may

include additional aspects which are relevant to the specific challenge):

1) Individual reactions to the crisis and challenges to European solidarity

At the levels of individuals and society, research will explore the links between the meta-social frameworks and the meta-psychic frameworks in modern societies in Europe in the context of the crisis. It should combine theoretical and empirical work in this endeavour, taking explicitly into account the gender dimension as well as spatial justice. Research should also explore solidarity both as an intellectual concept and in its more practical expressions. It will explore the links between the psychological effects of the crisis and perceptions of solidarity and will assess and test the conditions of acts of solidarity by individuals and investigate to what extent the crisis has influenced people's preparedness to show solidarity with others. Finally, it will provide a critical assessment of what kind of policy responses have in the past undermined European solidarity and will develop a coherent vision of policy responses which are prone to instilling solidarity.

2) Unity in diversity: prospects of a European identity and public sphere

Research should identify and pioneer ways in which European society can critically reflect upon itself, including its historical, cultural roots, collective memory and social imaginaries. Inquiry into Europe's intellectual base should consider the emergence of a European public sphere which facilitates these reflective discourses at the European level. Research should be transdisciplinary and address whether and how Europe's pluralism and cultural diversity as well as a richness of potentially multiple identities, can be understood as an asset of the European project, which may engender rather than undermine cohesion and serve as a resource for finding ways to ameliorate the crisis at a social level. Research should also investigate the conceptual strength of innovative, genuinely supranational approaches to identity, which are based on values, institutions, legal procedures and discourses. The analysis should draw on existing examples of supranational identities as well as identify the values and social bonds underlying them. Finally, research should consider the emergence of a transnational communicative sphere in Europe and what kind of policy and legal initiatives might facilitate it.

3) Innovative social investment approaches for the modernisation of social policies and services

The research should identify innovative and strategic approaches to social welfare reform at various levels. It should consider the distribution of the policy, social and managerial roles between public, private and third sectors. Special attention should be paid to the legal framework and the interaction and complementarity of the functions of social welfare policies in the medium to long term. The research should also pay attention to the policy evaluation of social outcomes, social returns and

effectiveness of interventions for the various actors, contributors and beneficiaries concerned. Consideration should be given to different types of expenditures, to an optimal distribution of costs and benefits, including those non-financial, and to the most effective means of public investment, including in public administration and public services. Attention should be paid to the gender dimension of social policies as well as generational justices and the challenge to develop sustainable pension schemes. Comparative and multidisciplinary research on social investment at global level could also bring added value.

The research is expected to comprehensively address one, or possibly a combination of, the above-mentioned dimensions. In so doing, proposals may also cover other areas related to the social dimension of the crisis.

The Commission considers that proposals requesting a contribution from the EU of between EUR 1.5 and 2.5 million would allow this specific challenge to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

Expected Impact: Research projects under this topic are expected to contribute to enhancing European society's resilience by identifying common ground which may serve as a facilitator for a renewed resolve to foster European integration.

In particular, research is envisaged to expand and deepen the knowledge base on the discontent expressed by individuals in modern societies and on the ways in which their sense of identity is shaped. It should help to point to the cultural shifts that combine social and psychological transformations which would be necessary in order to address the deepest manifestations of crisis in Europe. Research is also expected to support European efforts to enhance a sense of solidarity among citizens. It will also contribute to debates on policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the public sphere to allow for more open and more rigorous debate on European topics within national media.

Multidisciplinary research under this topic is also expected to identify the potential for innovative ways of implementing and financing social welfare systems, including through third and private sector contributions complementing public investments in this area and take into account social rights aspects. The envisaged research is expected to contribute to the effective implementation of the Social Investment Package's priorities in general and to the building of the future knowledge bank on social policies in particular.

Proposals should involve relevant stakeholders with a view to integrating their insights into both the empirical and theoretical inquiry and to establish a dialogue on the issues covered by this topic.

Type of action: Research and innovation actions

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