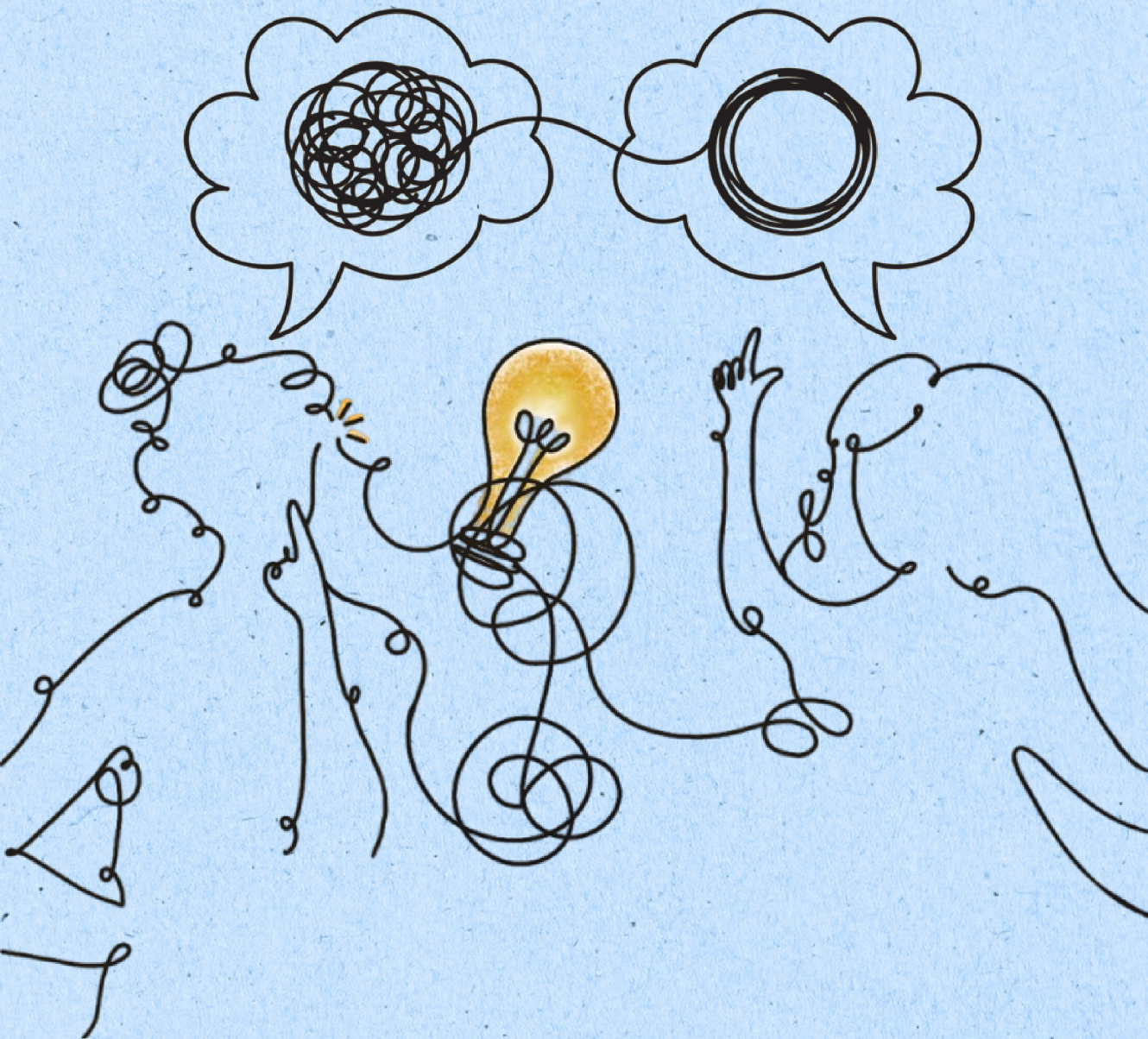
eyes on europe

SPECIAL MAGAZINE | #IDEAS 2024 | BILINGUAL



Editors' notes

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are struggling to adapt to the profound changes of the European economy resulting from demographic ageing, digitalisation and the green transition. Housing issues, the visible lack of performant and accessible public services, in-work poverty and energy poverty, gender and all kinds of discrimination are undermining the fabric of all European societies. Citizens are concerned that their well-being, and that of their children, could deteriorate in the future. In the face of these challenges, we observe persisting gaps in welfare across the East, West, North and South of the continent.

Scholars across different disciplines have analysed the concept of inequality. Nonetheless, a lot remains to be done to understand whether the EU is doing enough and why (not) to address inequality issues. What forms of inequality are affecting citizens and how are they changing? Which legal and policy instruments is the EU using to tackle inequality? Are they effective? What are the underlying political debates?

On 15 to 17 May 2024, the second edition of IDEAS, a conference in Interdisciplinary European Advanced Studies, took place at the *Institut d'études européennes* of the *Université libre de Bruxelles* (IEE-ULB). It aimed to explore the new frontiers of our respective disciplines to push further interdisciplinarity and avoid keeping knowledge in silos.

It was an honour to bring together over 50 scholars at all stages of their careers from a broad range of disciplines (including history, sociology, political science, political economy or law) who presented their research across 16 panels. Our objective was to stimulate the cross-fertilization of cutting-edge research in Europe, and beyond, allowing exchange with the Brussels-based policy-making community.

Besides paper panels, the conference featured two special moments. First, a twofold keynote speech from Prof. Martin Seeleib-Kaiser (University of Tübingen) and Prof. Zoe Lefkofridi (University of Salzburg) addressed issues respectively about the obstacles to and prospects for a genuine European social citizenship, and EU policies to promote equality in terms of gender and LGBTQ+ rights. Second, a policy panel co-hosted with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) gathered personalities from politics and civil society to exchange on the pressing topic of affordable housing in Europe.

We are very happy to see that the rich debates that took place in May are prolonged through this special issue of the magazine Eyes on Europe. The articles you are about to read combine the best of both worlds: academic excellence and new perspectives on edge-cutting issues.



Prof. Amandine Crespy
&
Prof. Chloé Brière

Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence EUqualis

Institut d'études européennes
Université libre de Bruxelles

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L’accès à la justice pour les migrants

un labyrinthe sans issue

Cette année, l'Institut d'Études Européennes de Bruxelles a accueilli la Conférence biennale sur les Études Supérieures Interdisciplinaires Européennes. Un événement scientifique qui a rassemblé des chercheurs pour discuter du sujet des inégalités dans le contexte des politiques européennes. Parmi les sujets adressés, les disparités dans la politique extérieure ont été au centre de cet événement ainsi que la recherche de Madame Chloé Brière, Présidente de l’Institut, sur l’impacte de l'externalisation et l’informalisation de la responsabilité judiciaire, qui a été une occasion en plus d’explorer ce thème en détail.

Il y a quelques semaines, dans la perspective des élections européennes qui viennent de se dérouler, quinze États Membres ont signé une lettre adressée à la Commission Européenne en demandant un resserrement du Pacte européen sur la Migration et l'Asile et le renforcement des contrôles aux frontières. Et ce, afin d’intercepter les bateaux en provenance d’Afrique avant qu’ils n’arrivent en Europe et de conduire les migrants dans des centres de rapatriement situés dans des pays partenaires extra-européens. Pour leur accorder - selon eux - des “conditions meilleures”, et ainsi ne pas risquer leur vie pour des voyages extrêmes, sans réussite sûre.

La brève lettre élève, mot après mot, un mur autour de l’Union avec la requête utopique de rediriger les migrants partout, sauf sur le territoire de l’UE. Une wishing list prétentieuse qui arrive à la fin d’une campagne électorale pendant laquelle le sujet migratoire et la nécessité de protéger les frontières ont été au centre du débat de l'extrême droite pour la course aux européennes. Si la politique migratoire européenne est un terrain extrêmement glissant, qui met en difficulté les plus convaincus des européistes, c’est grâce à sa dimension externe.

Cette dimension se concrétise, par exemple, par la création de hub d'accueil pour les migrants dans des pays tiers. Ce dernier est un exemple clair d’une conduite qui s’est progressivement consolidée au niveau européen pendant les dernières décennies. Ce phénomène est appelé “externalisation”, c’est-à-dire la tendance de l’UE à charger des pays partenaires non-européens d’assister les États membres pour la rétention et la gestion des flux migratoires.

La responsabilité de gestion peut être accordée à travers des modalités différentes. Néanmoins, les habitudes de l’Union en la matière ont changé ces dernières années. Il y a quelque temps déjà que les institutions européennes favorisent les solutions informelles plutôt que les moyens classiques, comme des instruments diplomatiques ou des accords juridiquement contraignants. Les solutions informelles échappent à la rigidité juridique en optant pour des “soft law alternatives”, comme par exemple des accords de coopération ou des Memoranda of Understanding avec les potentiels partenaires.

Les personnes qui estiment qu'il suffit d'inverser les trajets des voyages, semblent oublier un détail non négligeable : cette gestion externalisée et informelle impacte la vie des migrants, exposés au risque de ne pas voir garantit leurs droits essentiels et affecte leur accès à la justice nationale et européenne.

Qui arrive à rejoindre le territoire européen peut revendiquer ses droits auprès d’une cour nationale ou européenne ; qui n’arrive pas, pourrait ne pas bénéficier la même possibilité. En fait, pour avoir accès à un tribunal impartial, les parties impliquées doivent démontrer la présence de ce qu’on appelle “facteur de connexion”, c’est-à-dire un élément qui montre que le cas en question relève de la compétence nationale.

La Cour de Justice de l'Union Européenne, ainsi que la Cour Européenne pour les Droits de l'Homme, retiennent généralement une interprétation stricte de ce qu'est le champ d'application territorial de l'UE et des normes européennes. Malgré une timide exploration de la voie d'une possible application extra-territoriale des normes et des procédures de la Charte de l'UE et de la CEDH, l'approche de la juridiction pour répondre à cette question est fortement restrictive et empêche les migrants d'accéder à un traitement juridique.

Afin de surmonter cette limite et trouver un équilibre entre l'éthique universelle de protection des droits de l'homme (qui semble défier la nature universelle de cette charte) et l'existence de frontières nationales, certains intellectuels ont proposé une approche alternative. Madame Violeta Moreno Lax, prestigieuse chercheuse à l'Université de Barcelone, propose d'adopter un modèle "fonctionnel" qui va au-delà du principe de territorialité et assure le niveau minimum de protection des droits humains aux migrants. La question de savoir si les tribunaux sont prêts à modifier leur approche interprétative est une autre question, qui elle est loin d'être réglée.

Mais l'empechement à l'accès territorial n'est pas le seul obstacle pour les migrants qui cherchent une protection légale. L'informalité des accords conclus par l'UE avec les pays tiers amène aussi à un problème d'attribution des compétences juridiques et légales au niveau national et européen. Qui est l'auteur de l'accord entre l'UE et la Turquie ? Et de l'accord entre l'UE et la Tunisie ? L'identification des acteurs impliqués dans les accords n'est pas suffisante. Si l'autorité juridique de l'accord n'est pas établie, sa légalité ne peut être contestée, ce qui contribue à rendre encore plus problématique, voire impossible, une possible action légale de la part des migrants. Plus qu' un mur, un vrai labyrinthe !

Aussi dans ce cas, des nouvelles visions alternatives ne manquent pas. Certains ont proposé le concept de "pseudo-autorité", en attribuant à l'UE une compétence de facto, considérant les Etats Membres comme les acteurs légaux effectifs. Ce lien pourrait déjà permettre à l'UE, selon ceux qui soutiennent cette initiative, de se charger de la vérification des violations soulevées. D'autres ont invoqué l'intervention d'autres organismes, tels que les Organes de Traités des Nations unies ou la Cour Pénale Internationale. Ces nouvelles portes interprétatives, aussi innovantes soient-elles, semblent pour l'instant difficilement applicables.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que la projection de l'action extérieure que l'Union a décidé d'entreprendre par le biais d'accords qui échappent à la rigidité législative des Traités et des normes, ne fait qu'aggraver la condition des migrants qui essaient d'entrer sur le territoire européen. Ces derniers déjà fortement exposés au risque de ne pas bénéficier - dans les "centres de retour" extérieurs souhaités par les signataires de la fameuse "lettre" - des garanties et des droits de l'homme minimaux et nécessaires auxquels tous, sans distinction, devraient avoir accès.

Ceux qui ont la chance d'arriver pourraient possiblement revendiquer leurs droits, dans le cadre d'un accord dont il est cependant impossible d'identifier le responsable. Ainsi donc, comment sortir de ce labyrinthe?



Maria Carmela Noviello

MA2 en Études Européennes

A personal reflection on the EU's official narratives and Boels' criticism

INTRODUCTION

*This article is a reflection on the intervention by **VUB PhD candidate Nadège Boels**; European Sanctions in Belarus as catalyzer of Europe/non-Europe, during IEE's **IDEAS conference** as part of panel 12. In the following lines, I'll first descriptively delve into the nature and origin of EU sanctions, offering in a second part a critical review based on Boels' research, and to conclude by sharing a personal reflection of both perspectives.*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EU SANCTIONS

The EU's sanctions policy has evolved significantly since the 1980s. Initially, the European Community did not adopt its own sanctions, relying instead on measures implemented by member states in response to UN Security Council resolutions. The 1980s marked the beginning of a coordinated European sanctions policy, starting with the adoption of measures against the Soviet Union over its invasion of Afghanistan.

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 strengthened the EU's ability to coordinate sanctions under its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Since then, the number of countries under EU sanctions has increased steadily, reflecting the growing importance of sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

Today, sanctions are applied under various regimes and can target governments, non-state entities, and individuals. Common measures include asset freezes and travel bans targeting specific individuals and entities responsible for objectionable actions, arms embargoes aiming at prohibiting the export of military goods, or sector-based measures, restricting economic and financial activities, such as import and export bans or limitations on banking services.

The EU's current sanctions landscape is extensive, covering a wide range of countries and issues. The most well-known sanctions regime is targeting Russian individuals and entities following the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

THE OFFICIAL EU NARRATIVE ON SANCTIONS

The European Union has long used sanctions as a key component of its foreign policy. Officially, these measures are seen as those used by normative powers, meaning within the context of promoting democracy, human rights, and international peace and security. However, some critical perspectives, as in the case of Boel's research, argue that EU sanctions often serve imperialist purposes in an attempt to exert control and influence over other nations.

According to the European Parliament, EU sanctions are designed to support international peace and security, prevent threats to peace, and promote human rights and democracy. The EU implements sanctions based on decisions of the UN Security Council or autonomously to address specific policies or actions of states and non-state actors that threaten these principles.

According to the European External Action Service, EU sanctions are not punitive, since they are not directed at a country or its population. Instead, they are focused specifically on particular policies or activities, the resources needed to carry them out, and the individuals accountable for them.

Thus, sanctions are described as targeted measures aimed at minimising adverse consequences for civilian populations. They include several instruments, such as asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes, and sector-based measures affecting economic and financial activities. The EU emphasises that sanctions are part of a comprehensive policy approach, involving political dialogue and complementary efforts.

BOELS' CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Critics argue that the EU's sanctions, particularly those imposed on Belarus, as highlighted in the case of Boels' research, reflect an imperialist approach rather than purely normative objectives. This view is supported by several key points.

Critics assert that the European Union's sanctions on Belarus are driven more by security and geopolitical interests than by a genuine concern for the promotion of democracy and human rights. The sanctions were imposed following several significant events: the widespread civic protests in Belarus in 2020, the controversial and forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk in order to arrest two opposition activists and journalists, and Belarus' unwavering support for Russia in the ongoing war in Ukraine. These incidents served as catalysts, prompting the EU to enact measures aimed at undermining the stability of the Belarusian regime and reducing its alignment with Russian geopolitical interests.

Sanctions are often perceived as strategic tools used to exert economic and political control over targeted nations. By imposing economic hardships and isolating regimes from the international community, the EU aims to pressure these governments into complying with its policies and norms.

This approach reflects a dynamic reminiscent of historical imperialist practices, where economic pressures and sanctions were employed to maintain control over territories and populations. The goal is to weaken the targeted regime's internal stability, thereby forcing it to reconsider its alliances and political strategies.

Furthermore, critics highlight the EU's selective application of sanctions, pointing out that human rights abuses and undemocratic actions by some regimes are often ignored while others are heavily sanctioned. This selective enforcement raises questions about the underlying motives of the EU's foreign policy. The inconsistency in the application of sanctions suggests that they are applied based on strategic interests rather than a genuine commitment to upholding normative values such as human rights and democracy.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: BALANCING EU'S CREDIBILITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA.

While I personally agree with Boels on her stance towards EU Sanctions Policy, I'm afraid that within the current scenario of global politics, it is paramount for the EU to remain a credible international power without relying on military capabilities. In this regard, it must keep its realistic geopolitical strategies applied to sanctions while balancing its traditional normative aspirations, something the EU should achieve based on the following reasons.

The first one is using sanctions to avoid militarisation. Relying solely on normative power may undermine the EU's ability to respond effectively to security threats. However, shifting towards military power could be contrary to the EU's foundational principles and unpopular among its member states. Sanctions offer a compromise to soft and normative power, allowing the EU to take decisive action without resorting to military intervention, and thus avoid becoming a military power.

Secondly, it would also help in maintaining normative credibility. While sanctions can be seen as coercive, they must be implemented transparently and consistently to maintain the EU's credibility. This means applying sanctions based on clear, universally applicable criteria and ensuring that they are part of a broader strategy that includes diplomatic efforts and support for democratic institutions.

Moreover, this European commitment to normative principles is reinforced by allowing sanctioned individuals to either request a review by the EU Council or appeal their case before the General Court of the European Union, a process not available under sanctions from third countries, such as in the case of US sanctions. This legal recourse strengthens the EU's image as a principle and rule-based entity committed to fairness and accountability.

Finally, a balanced approach to sanctions would serve as a positive evolution of sanctions policy. The EU's history of sanctions shows an evolution from broad, often blunt measures to more targeted approaches that aim to minimise humanitarian impact while maximising pressure on political and military leaders responsible for undesirable actions. This evolution reflects not just an attempt to align sanctions more closely with international legal standards and ethical considerations, but also to adapt its external action in an evolving global landscape through time. The world we know today has significantly changed, and the challenges the EU faces today are not the same as in the past when it first applied its sanction policy. A positive evolution of this instrument would serve a trend that would place the EU in global politics as a credible player committed to progress based on principles, as it has been historically.

The EU's reliance on sanctions as a key component of its foreign policy highlights the challenges of balancing normative ideals with geopolitical realities. While sanctions can serve as effective tools for promoting democracy and human rights, they also risk being perceived as instruments of imperialism if applied inconsistently or with underlying strategic motives, as highlighted by Boels. To enhance its credibility, the EU must ensure that sanctions are part of a comprehensive and transparent policy approach that includes diplomatic engagement and support for democratic reforms. This requires a delicate balance: sanctions must be strong enough to deter and punish undesirable behaviour, but also flexible and targeted enough to avoid undue harm to civilian populations and to encourage positive change.

To summarise, the EU's use of sanctions reflects its unique position as a global actor striving to uphold normative values while navigating complex geopolitical landscapes. Sanctions, if applied judiciously, could serve as a middle ground between soft power and military intervention, helping the EU to maintain its influence and credibility on the international stage. However, this requires a commitment to consistency, transparency, and a broader strategy that prioritises genuine partnership and cooperation over coercion and control. The critical perspective on EU sanctions suggests a need for a nuanced approach that recognises the dual role of sanctions in both promoting norms and securing strategic interests.



Mario Vega

MA2 in European Studies

Gender Equality in EU Policies and Actions

INTRODUCTION

The panel on Gender Equality on EU's policies and actions at the IDEAS conference was presented by ***Giulia Giraudo, Ilaria Lorusso and Matilde Ceron****, who discussed the situation of policy and governance issues regarding gender equality in the European Union. Giulia Giraudo is a PhD candidate at Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, with a focus on transnational governance. Ilaria Lorusso is also a PhD candidate and researcher in Feminist International Relations theories, intersectionality and migration studies. Matilde Ceron is a researcher at University of Salzburg and focuses on EU leadership selection, inter-institutional relations and public legitimacy.*

The issue of gender equality is often overlooked in academia, as it is seen as a more recent subject, not studied in depth, and sometimes not taken as seriously as it should. The panel underlines this tension and brings new depth and insights to the situation, underscoring the need to foster debates and knowledge around gender equality, especially in the EU setting. What emerged from the panel is that scientific evidence and policies do not align. A lot of knowledge and studies have been conducted on the matter, yet the tangible effects on civil society are quite limited. An overarching feeling is that there are other problems that need to be tackled, with gender and other inequalities falling short and being perceived as a secondary issue.

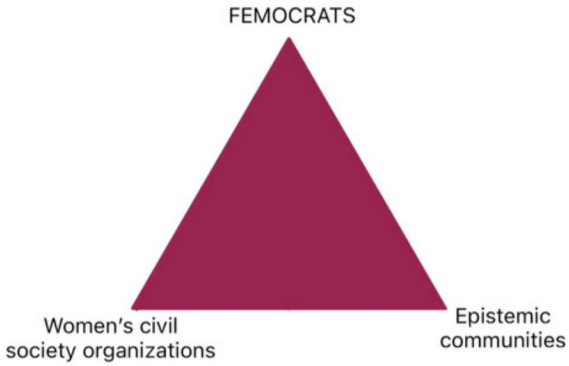
As this were highly complex topics with specific vocabulary, we will start with some definitions:

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

To integrate a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes and projects.

VELVET TRIANGLE

Heuristic concept designed to describe interactions between policymakers and politicians, feminist academics and experts, and the women's movement in European Union policymaking.



MONEY FOR NOTHING

Giulia Giraudo kicked off by explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on the crucial role of care labour in our societies, revealing stark gender disparities in who bears this burden. As women were disproportionately affected by the disruption of public care services, their ability to work was compromised, hindering progress towards gender equality. European responses, like the NextGenerationEU plan, recognised this urgent issue, aiming to integrate a gender perspective into policy design, especially concerning care policies.

Women were the most affected category across different areas of life: firstly, there is an asymmetric distribution of work, with women being underrepresented in some work settings and in higher positions of power. Secondly, there has been an increase in Gender Based Violence, and with the limited possibility to leave one's home, it became more difficult to escape from such violence. Third, access to healthcare was harder for everyone, but especially for women, as they are often treated unequally in medicine. Further, treatments regarding abortion and other forms of healthcare related to pregnancy were not as available and as accessible as in normal times. For example, during the pandemic in Hungary, surgical abortions were not available. In May 2020, the European Commission addressed all these gender inequality issues, plus there had also been a declaration of the UN and the Civil Society and Women's Lobby, but nothing had an effect and all the knowledge on the matter was not used to implement policies and improve women's situation. While scientific evidence and literature was available, the willingness to act on the matter was missing.

Giraudo then explained how gender considerations were incorporated into the Next GenerationEU plan, particularly in regard to care policies. Examined was the involvement of women in the policy formulation process and how their participation influenced the inclusion of women-friendly care policies.

Rather than focusing solely on women MEPs, it considers a broader network called the "Velvet Triangle," comprising feminist Eurocrats, experts, and activists, who played a pivotal role in advocating for gender equality in policy.

Initially, the European Commission's draft of the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation lacked any reference to gender equality. However, through the intervention of the Velvet Triangle, this was rectified, highlighting the importance of care policies as a means to address gender disparities.

Giraudo's thesis also discusses the societal implications of the care arrangements proposed within NextGenerationEU. It criticises the focus on activation and employment over equality and social cohesion. By examining these critical points through a social provisioning lens, it prompts reflection on the potential limitations and dangers of a care policy approach guided solely by a social investment perspective.

The conclusion drawn, for now, is that the Velvet Triangle has had a very weak effect on the policymaking area and civil society. The only committee employed to improve women's situation is the EU Employment Committee, and that was not enough, as it is a more systemic issue that touches numerous aspects of life, not limited to employment, but also present in health, safety, parenthood and many other fields.

VELVET TRIANGLES AND MORE: GENDER AND MIGRATION

Ilaria Lorusso discussed Gender Mainstreaming (GM), a powerful tool entrenched in international law to advance gender equality, which has taken on various forms since its inception in 1995, evolving within the EU into both conservative and progressive frameworks. Despite the EU's vocal support for GM, its application has been inconsistent, particularly in supposedly "gender-neutral" domains like security, foreign policy, and migration, which have been largely overlooked in GM discourse.

The question remains as to why the EU is not improving? Mainly because gender is treated as a subset of Human Rights policies, with a more rhetorical purpose.

Ilaria Lorusso unravels the enigma behind the GM approach in EU migration policy. By posing the question of "How do we decode the approach to Gender Mainstreaming in EU migration policy?", and by employing qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews and document scrutiny, the study draws upon the Velvet Triangle theory by Woodward (2004). It seeks to uncover why the EU adopts an integrationist GM approach in migration policy, characterised by surface-level quantitative measures that fail to address the root causes of gender disparities.

What emerges is a potential interest in the Velvet Triangle, but an overall lack of interest and of feminist conscience. One insight that Lorusso deemed as particularly insightful, was from one of the interviews she conducted:

> ***"What form and shape migration policies take will always be dominated by the overall approach or perception of migration or irregular migration, whatever you call it... I guess it also links to what I said, that gender will always be a second-order question, and I think, where it is a first order question, it will be mobilised to either legitimate or delegitimise migration."***

The investigation reveals that the integrationist stance can be attributed to structural flaws within the migration policy's Velvet Triangle. Moreover, it underscores the significant influence of the securitised approach to migration and the national interests of Member States in shaping the EU's overall GM strategy. This nuanced exploration sheds light on the complexities surrounding GM in migration management, offering insights into the interplay of structural dynamics and geopolitical imperatives within EU policy-making. The question posed at the end is: did the von Der Leyen presidency change something? Did her role as a woman shape policy outcomes?

Not really, no: she maintained the status quo, as women in higher positions of power usually tend to do. In substance, under her leadership, no substantial differences on women's issues, compared to any man before her, were observable.

WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION

Matilde Ceron's paper describes the situation that developed during the COVID-19 crisis, when women were significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles related to managing the health emergency and recovery efforts. This under-representation has coincided with increasing pressure from women's interest groups, who were frustrated by the lack of focus on issues critical to achieving gender equality during the pandemic. This situation raised an overall important question: How crucial is women's representation in ensuring that policies supporting their empowerment are prioritised?

To explore this question, the parliamentary debate surrounding the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) has been examined. This debate provides a clear example of how substantive representation — the idea that elected officials advocate for the interests and issues of the groups they represent — plays out in the context of COVID-19 recovery.

Ceron's paper compared how often male and female Members of Parliament (MPs) address parity-related issues, while also considering their ideological backgrounds. The findings suggest that representation indeed matters for women's empowerment policies, as women MPs are the primary advocates for gender parity concerns during the parliamentary debates, especially in the context of the Italian NRRP. This indicates that having women in legislative roles is crucial for bringing attention to and addressing issues that affect women's lives, as they are uniquely positioned to focus their efforts on these concerns with the necessary depth and understanding for effective advocacy and policy-making.



CONCLUSION

From the three perspectives analysed, a clear discrepancy emerged between academic literature and policy implementation: while research has extensively explored gender equality and offered numerous theories for practical application, these insights have not been effectively translated into policymaking. As highlighted by Giraudo, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored this gap.

During the pandemic, research and literature findings were closely aligned with actual societal developments. However, despite the relevance and timeliness of this research, policymakers often failed to utilise these insights, relegating gender equality issues to secondary status under the pretext of addressing more immediate concerns.

The research collectively underscores a critical point: without integrating gender equality into the core of policy actions, the disparity between literature and real-world application will persist, and gender equality will not be prioritised in policy actions.

Academic studies have meticulously documented the challenges women face and have proposed viable solutions, but these are frequently ignored in the policy sphere. This negligence is not due to a lack of understanding or awareness, but rather a failure to prioritise gender equality amidst other competing policy issues.



Sara Bordigato

MA2 in International Relations

Social Citizens for Digital Ages

INTRODUCTION

SPEAKERS: SILVIA NAYDENOVA, DAVID GOUARD, BENEDETTA VENTURATO, ALVARO OLEART

The current form of democratic state is often taken for granted, and many challenges persist. At the same time, technologies have made stunning advancements and have become an integral part of our daily lives. The question now arises whether it is possible to solve the challenges and issues that these two phenomena present by integrating their strengths.

To begin with, there is the call for a more social Europe, aiming to reach even those parts of the EU population that still perceive Brussels as very distant from their everyday lives. This sentiment is particularly prevalent in Eastern Europe. As highlighted by the last EU elections of 2019 which faced low turnout in many countries, in those regions of the EU many continue to face numerous challenges compared to the rest of the Union. Yet, the EU's strong social focus has been evident in its response to various unexpected challenges in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the inflation and cost-of-living crisis triggered by the sudden gas shortage.

However, much work remains to be done. This is where technology can play a crucial role: by leveraging digital tools and platforms, the EU can enhance communication and engagement with all its citizens, making its initiatives more accessible and transparent. Digitalisation can also facilitate better service delivery and support, especially in underrepresented regions, ensuring that the benefits of EU policies are felt more widely and equitably. Therefore, integrating technology into the EU's social strategies appears promising for building a truly inclusive and cohesive Europe.

Another challenge that technology can help to solve is the question of voting rights for the 15 million non-EU nationals living in the member states. Addressing this issue is vital for enhancing a sense of belonging and participation among all residents, not just citizens, of the Union. Allowing non-EU nationals to vote in local and perhaps even European elections could significantly enhance their integration and representation, making them feel more connected to the communities they live in.

Studies conducted in France show that a majority of non-EU nationals ultimately aspire to become citizens, reflecting high levels of integration and politicisation. Furthermore, non-EU nationals tend to use technology more extensively in order to integrate into their new environments, utilising digital platforms for language learning, job searching, and connecting with local communities. Identifying the main factors that influence registration and turnout for local and European elections among non-EU nationalities is crucial and a key to achieve this include measure the level of integration, awareness of voting rights and the accessibility of the registration process.

Interestingly, non-EU citizens tend to be more active at the local level than at the national and European levels in terms of practice and representation.

This trend suggests that increasing the political engagement of non-EU nationals should also start at the local level, where the impact of participation is more immediately felt.

Incorporating technology can streamline this process, ensuring that voter registration and participation are more accessible and efficient. Digital platforms can provide comprehensive information about voting rights, procedures, and the importance of civic engagement. Additionally, secure online voting systems could make it easier for all residents to participate in elections, reducing logistical barriers and encouraging higher voter turnout.

Nonetheless, despite all the benefits and the help that technology could offer in tackling these challenges, it is worth noting that many other issues might arise.

Technology and the digital world are indeed one of the most pervasive and addictive creations of our time. While they offer incredible opportunities for growth and integration, they also bring significant risks, especially for the most vulnerable groups. While it is true that we can use them intelligently to integrate people into society, access essential services, and maintain contact with families and friends, children and adolescents can suffer negatively from excessive use of technology, experiencing mental health problems and attention deficits.

Many countries are investing significant resources in digitalisation, but often overlook the importance of digital awareness and digital detox measures. Educating citizens about the risks and benefits of technology use is essential to promoting a responsible and sustainable use of digital resources.

Moreover, talking about the digital divide is crucial. The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have easy access to the internet and digital technologies and those who do not. This divide can exacerbate existing inequalities, as those without access are left behind in education, employment opportunities, and social inclusion. The European Union has already recognised the systemic risks associated with this, even emphasising how it can affect the application of fundamental rights. Indeed, unequal access to digital technologies can widen social and economic disparities, making public intervention even more urgent to ensure substantial equality. Ensuring equal access to digital technologies is essential for upholding the principles of equality and fairness enshrined in the base documents of the Union. Just as governments are obligated to remove economic and social barriers that limit the freedom and equality of citizens, they should also strive to bridge the digital divide to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in the digital age.

Another issue connected to the new digital world is related to disinformation and fake news. Navigating the intricate landscape of disinformation requires addressing its normative, empirical, and political dimensions, particularly in the European context. An important aspect of this is understanding the interconnectedness of actors across different fields and how influence strategies to combat disinformation are implemented at both the EU and national levels.



Within the EU framework, institutional strategies reflect a debate over regulating the public sphere, with tech companies exerting significant lobbying efforts to shape policy discourse. Social media giants, driven by the imperative to safeguard their business models, have indeed gained considerable influence in defining EU-level disinformation policies through pre-emptive and conflictual cooperation. Scholars have delineated four broad political responses to disinformation: moral condemnation, active prosecution, technological solutionism, and the re-establishment of truth-making centres. These responses have the problem of having competing visions of the public sphere and democracy, as diverse actors have their proper vision of truth, and they manage the regulatory landscape according to their preferences. The regulatory approach to disinformation holds profound implications for the EU's internal market and democratic process. Understanding this dynamic enables us to anticipate how different actors may be empowered or marginalised based on prevailing approaches to combat disinformation. A crucial aspect of addressing disinformation lies in increasing the collaboration between institutions and digital organisations. By using the expertise and the resources of both sectors, synergies can be created to counter the spread of fake news effectively. This collaboration may contain initiatives such as joint research, information-sharing platforms, and coordinated response mechanisms to swiftly find false narratives and promote digital literacy.

In conclusion, the convergence of welfare state structures and advancing technologies presents both opportunities and challenges for European societies. While significant steps can be taken with the help of technology in particular in terms of participation for the excluded masses, still many issues are created by them which appear to require some kind of public action. One of the key challenges lies in countering the digital divide, which perpetuates inequalities in access to digital technologies and increases already existing social disparities. Moreover, the proliferation of disinformation creates a formidable threat to European democracies, necessitating concerted efforts to combat its spread. As we navigate these complex issues, it is crucial to recognise the interplay between technology, politics, and societal norms. By embracing interdisciplinary approaches and fostering dialogue between diverse stakeholders, we can strive towards building a more inclusive, resilient, and democratic Europe for generations to come. Creating social citizens in the digital age becomes thus a must in order to create a prosperous Europe for everybody.



Filippo Segato
MA2 in European Studies

Mobilité : catalyseur ou réducteur d'inégalités sociales ?

INTRODUCTION

La Conférence IDEAS, organisée à l'Institut d'Études Européennes du 15 au 17 mai 2024, a rassemblé des chercheur.euses de différentes disciplines en plusieurs panels afin de présenter leur recherche sur les inégalités sociales en relation avec la politique européenne. Les paragraphes suivants traitent du panel intitulé ***"Mobility: a Tool for Reducing or Fueling Inequalities?"*** *(trad. Mobilité : un outil pour réduire ou alimenter les inégalités ?), où des chercheur.euses tels que* ***Pierre-Édouard Weill, Cecilia Bruzelius, Lea Reiss, Dion Kramer, Matjaž Tratnik et Petra Weingerl*** *ont discuté de la liberté de mouvement des travailleur.euses, les liens entre immigrations et émigrations dans le prisme de la mobilité, ou encore les mesures pour lutter contre la fuite de capital humain.*

La mobilité urbaine, qu'elle soit alimentée par des moyens de transport publics ou privés, est un moteur essentiel du développement des villes. Cependant, derrière son apparente neutralité se cachent des dynamiques sociales profondes qui peuvent soit renforcer les inégalités soit contribuer à les atténuer. L'accès aux modes de transport, la conception des infrastructures routières et les politiques de mobilité ont un impact significatif sur la vie quotidienne des individus, ce qui d'une certaine manière façonne leurs opportunités et leurs expériences sociales. Ainsi, selon la façon dont elle est conçue et mise en œuvre, la mobilité peut agir comme un catalyseur ou un réducteur d'inégalités sociales.

Il est important de comprendre que les choix en matière de mobilité ne sont pas simplement des décisions techniques, mais qu'ils sont étroitement liés aux enjeux économiques, environnementaux et sociaux qui caractérisent nos sociétés contemporaines. Par conséquent, explorer le lien entre mobilité et inégalités sociales est essentiel pour comprendre les défis auxquels sont confrontés les villes européennes et pour concevoir des solutions qui favorisent une société plus inclusive et équitable.

FRACTURES URBAINES ET ÉCOLOGIQUES : LES DÉFIS DE L'URBANISATION

L'urbanisation progressive des sociétés européennes a rendu les villes incontournables. En tant que centres d'activités humai-nes, elles ont transformé et dépassé les fractures géographiques naturelles, y superposant de nouvelles fractures sociales. Les politiques urbaines revêtent donc une importance majeure, car elles influencent la nature et l'intensité de ces fractures.

Bien que les politiques urbaines ne soient pas intrinsèquement discriminatoires, elles peuvent le devenir si elles ignorent les facteurs sociaux influençant l'urbanisation. En effet, la mobilité doit s'inscrire dans une perspective plus large d'urbanisme, tenant compte de la construction de logements, des zones industrielles et culturelles, etc., au risque de créer et même d'aggraver les inégalités sociales.

Les modes de transport dans les milieux urbains, et en particulier leurs dessertes des zones périurbaines, posent également des défis pour la cohésion sociale, notamment en raison des pressions qu'ils exercent sur les espaces naturels en périphérie des villes. Ce constat, bien qu'il puisse sembler paradoxal, ne l'est pas. En effet, les inégalités sociales paraissent être exacerbées par l'installation simultanée des classes moyennes supérieures dans les centres-villes et les zones périurbaines. Cependant, cette apparente contradiction révèle en réalité les différentes dynamiques sociales induites par le développement des transports publics, mettant en évidence un "privilège de la mobilité" qui agit comme un nouveau marqueur de disparité sociale. Ce privilège confère des avantages significatifs en termes de déplacements et offre des opportunités géographiques variées en matière d'installation résidentielle.

De plus, la relation entre inégalités sociales et mobilité doit être mise en perspective avec la transition écologique. Comme les politiques urbaines, les politiques environnementales peuvent être des vecteurs d'inégalités sociales si elles ne tiennent pas compte des disparités économiques entre les citoyens. Les mesures correctives de ces politiques environnementales sont de plus en plus présentes dans les sphères politiques européennes et nationales. Cependant, le principe “ne laisser personne de côté” incarné par le *Mécanisme pour une transition juste* de la Commission européenne ne fait pas l'unanimité.

En effet, la plupart de ces politiques ont un impact asymétrique selon les citoyens. Prenons l'exemple de la voiture individuelle. Reconnu comme l'un des moyens de transport les plus polluants lorsqu'il utilise des énergies fossiles, la voiture individuelle est non seulement représentative d'un échelon social, mais également un élément fondamental du pouvoir d'achat des classes sociales.

La remise en cause de ce modèle, souvent initiée par les partis écologistes, a diverses conséquences en fonction des classes sociales. Paradoxalement, la solution préconisée, à savoir la voiture électrique, permettrait de maintenir un mode de vie similaire tout en réduisant drastiquement les externalités négatives après conception. Malheureusement, le coût des voitures électriques et le manque d'accessibilité (bornes de recharge peu fréquentes, inadaptées, etc.) font de ces dernières l'un des symboles les plus tranchants du décalage entre justice sociale et justice climatique.

LES ENJEUX DE LA MOBILITÉ : UNE PERSPECTIVE DE GENRES

Si la mobilité n’est pas socialement neutre, elle ne l’est pas non plus en termes de genre. Les femmes et les hommes ne se déplacent pas de la même manière et les femmes subissent des pressions spécifiques dans l'espace public. Dans les visions les plus traditionalistes, le rôle de la femme est souvent associé à l'immobilité : elle reste au foyer, elle sort peu et s'occupe des enfants et de la maison. Se déplacer librement constitue donc une forme d'émancipation, mais l'égalité en la matière n'est pas encore atteinte. De nombreuses études, telles que celles de l'European Mobility Atlas et du Monitor, le démontrent. Ces enquêtes révèlent que 30% des femmes se déplacent pour le travail salarié contre 50 % des hommes. En ce qui concerne le travail du *care*, 20% des femmes se déplacent contre seulement 7% des hommes. En Belgique, à partir de 35 ans, les hommes utilisent davantage la voiture que les femmes, qui préfèrent les transports en commun ou la marche. Cela rend les enjeux d’intermodalité plus importants pour les femmes.

Selon une étude de Brussels Studies, 98 % des femmes ont subi du harcèlement dans l'espace public. Les dangers de l'espace public poussent les femmes à se déplacer différemment des hommes, en adoptant des modalités particulières.

Cela est particulièrement visible lorsqu'elles sont piétonnes, car la lenteur et l'immersion rendent la personne plus sensible à son environnement. Les femmes tendent donc à marcher plus vite et à choisir des chemins plus courts, comme en témoigne l'enquête du Monitor qui montre que les hommes parcourent plus de kilomètres que les femmes. Pour les mêmes raisons, les femmes évitent certains endroits ou ne sortent pas à certaines heures si elles perçoivent un danger potentiel.

En ce qui concerne la conduite automobile, les hommes roulent en moyenne plus dangereusement que les femmes. Selon l'Institut Vias, 73% des hommes roulent à 140 km/h sur l'autoroute contre 54% des femmes. De plus, les accidents de la route impliquant des femmes conductrices ont deux fois plus de chances d'éviter des décès. Par ailleurs, les hommes sont quatre fois plus susceptibles que les femmes de conduire en état d'ébriété.

Au niveau européen, quelques initiatives ont été prises pour inclure les facteurs de genre dans les politiques de mobilité. Le *gender mainstreaming*, c'est-à-dire une méthode d'analyse transversale qui intègre les critères de genre dans l'analyse des politiques publiques, est largement utilisé dans les politiques de mobilité de l'Union européenne. Par exemple, la directive "Équilibre entre vie professionnelle et vie privée" (Work-life Balance Directive), qui vise à pallier la sous-représentation des femmes sur les marchés du travail, prend en compte la question de la mobilité, notamment en promouvant des accords plus flexibles pour les déplacements domicile-travail. En mai 2024, l'Union européenne a également adopté sa première directive visant à mettre fin aux violences faites aux femmes, incluant le harcèlement dans l'espace public et dans les transports en commun.

Plus globalement, l'Union européenne promeut les moyens de transports plus verts et la mobilité douce, ce qui bénéficie particulièrement aux femmes, car ces options sont plus accessibles et moins coûteuses.

LA MOBILITÉ, UN OUTIL MODULABLE

Il s'agit alors de penser la mobilité comme une composante essentielle et multifacette du tissu social, permettant à fois de perpétuer les inégalités ou, a contrario, d'offrir des voies d'émancipation, d'égalité et d'équité pour les minorités sociales.

Dans un monde où l'urbanisation façonne la vie quotidienne des citoyens européens, les politiques de mobilité et les politiques urbaines doivent donc intégrer une perspective holistique et systémique si l'on veut qu'elles représentent un levier d'inclusion.

En définitive, la mobilité doit être abordée comme un outil modulable, capable de façonner notre société de manière positive ou négative selon les choix que nous faisons. Il est propre à chacun d'entre nous, aux décideurs politiques, aux urbanistes et aux citoyens, de saisir cette opportunité pour construire un avenir où la mobilité est véritablement au service de toutes et tous.



Marie El Bouziani

MA2 en Études Européennes





Housing Justice in Europe:
Addressing Inequality through Affordable Housing

Policy Brief by Laura Schmeer on the IDEAS24 Policy Panel 'Affordable Housing and (In)equality in the European Union'

'Housing is a human right.' This principle, upheld by international human rights law, is far from the reality for many Europeans struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Because of persisting inflation and rising energy costs, housing prices have enormously increased: average rents in Europe went up by 19 % over the past decade and house prices by an impressive 47 %. This, along with a shortage of social and affordable housing, has caused a European housing crisis.

The decrease in investment in the housing sector since the financial crisis and the 'airbnbification' (i.e. the growing number of short-term rentals) in urban and tourist areas further degrade the situation. Today, people spend a growing proportion of their income on mortgages or rent. Equally troubling, nearly half of tenants in the private renting market fear they might lose their homes due to their inability to pay the rent. In short, housing and, more generally, the cost of living has become a pressing issue affecting ever more people in more and more parts of the population increasingly severely and across all EU member states. The serious and widespread character of the phenomenon calls for a European approach to tackle the problem.

Such a picture was the starting point of the Policy Panel on Affordable Housing and (In)equality in the EU, organised by the ULB's Institut d'études européennes, in collaboration with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), in the framework of the #IDEAS24 conference on 'Inequality and the European Union. New frontiers in European Studies'. The panel, chaired by László Andor, Secretary General of FEPS and former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion, brought together Michaela Kauer, Director at the Brussels Office of the City of Vienna, Sorcha Edwards, General Secretary of Housing Europe, and Ana Carla Pereira, a member of the Cabinet of EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit.

Why is the unaffordability of housing so problematic? The lack of affordable housing has wider ramifications beyond the individual difficulty of finding a place to live. For instance, it has negative implications for the overall health of a community through strains on mental health, a lack of adequate warmth, or homelessness. Unable to find affordable homes in the city centres, people may also experience limited access to health care, employment, schooling, and social and cultural life. On an economic level, the lack of affordable housing also leads to a lack of labour for companies.

Beyond that, three crucial implications of the housing crisis emerged from the panel debate: the intersectional character of housing inequality; the interplay between the housing crisis and climate change; and democratic challenges arising from the housing crisis.

First, all panellists highlighted that the lack of affordable housing disproportionately concerns vulnerable populations who already experience discrimination. Particularly affected groups are women (especially single mothers), persons with disability, young people (the "generation rent"), religious and ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, LGBTQI+ persons, and persons living in poverty. As different generations, residents of different geographical areas, and members of different social or ethnic groups have uneven access to affordable housing, ethnic, social, and economic inequality are, thus, all closely linked to housing inequality. The intersectional nature of the housing crisis, thereby, recalls the #IDEAS24 Keynote held by Zoe Lefkofridi on 'Democracy and Gender Equality in Times of Backlash', where she also emphasised that different oppressions (sexism, racism, classism, etc.) are intersecting with each other and mutually construct each other.

The second crucial theme emerging from the panel debate concerns the interplay between the housing crisis and the green transition. The climate and housing crises indeed interact in three main ways: (1) the climate crisis affects people's ability to enjoy their right to adequate housing (e.g., through climate-induced disasters that destroy people's homes); (2) climate policies may also negatively affect this right, especially for marginalised groups (e.g., by making new or renovated energy-efficient buildings unaffordable for low-income groups); (3) housing itself contributes to the climate crisis (the housing sector accounts for 37 % of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions and, thus, has a huge carbon footprint). Indeed, as highlighted by Pereira, around € 275 billion are needed every year to make buildings more energy-efficient, while some families are not even able to keep their homes warm. As a consequence, a new issue, namely 'sustainable affordable housing' is emerging on the EU level.

Finally, democratic challenges linked to the housing crisis ran like a thread throughout the panel debate. For instance, as highlighted by Edwards, politicians tend to go for 'vote winners' in their programmes, and those often do not represent the general interest (like providing affordable housing). Moreover, different vulnerable or disadvantaged social groups are currently fighting each other for the little available housing stock, which is a deep political problem with potentially 'explosive dynamics' (Kauner). Last, we can witness a politicisation of the affordable housing topic by far-right parties in Europe. For example, far-right politicians in the Netherlands and Portugal use housing to point to migrants and refugees as scapegoats, presenting them as the cause of all problems, including the housing shortage. Such developments have also fuelled fears surrounding the 2024 European elections and the expected rise of far-right, populist parties. The corresponding shift in the balance of political forces in the EU (within the European Parliament, but also the College of Commissioners, for example) could make it even more difficult to realise certain projects, like addressing the housing crisis in an inclusive manner.

Despite those worrying outlooks, the panellists sketched several avenues to escape the housing crisis. Not forgetting the context of the debate, panellists first gave some homework to academia. Further research is needed especially to closely monitor the housing situation in Europe, for example, by providing better data on investments, profits and beneficiaries, as well as prices. Another crucial area of investigation is the political and social conflicts underlying the competition for affordable living space and the implications this has for the rise of far-right parties.

One key theme of the policy recommendations was the importance of an interventionist approach. Since a market-oriented, neoliberal approach has clearly failed to provide a sufficient supply of affordable housing, states should take control over local housing stocks, achieving a price-dampening effect on the overall housing market through a critical mass of protected (public or cooperative) property.

In contrast, the EU is extremely constrained in addressing the housing crisis, since the Treaties leave social protection and inclusion in the hands of the Member States. There are, however, possibilities to legislate, for example, through rules on the single market, the provision of services, or public investment. There is also a big potential to prioritise and improve the channelling of investments (e.g., cohesion funds or the Recovery and Resilience Facility) to housing, for example, by adapting state aid rules so that they do not prevent member states from addressing the housing crisis. The so-called political guidelines of the Commission (which define the mandate of the next Commission and, thus, determine what it must deliver) could be a way for the European Parliament to exert political pressure on the EU executive to act. As highlighted by Pereira, the European Parliament can negotiate parts of these political guidelines before confirming the next Commission President.

On a more fundamental level, to exit the housing crisis, panellists suggested weakening the ownership of the housing issue by far-right parties, creating a positive and progressive narrative around it (Pereira), and addressing the deeper underlying issues of distributional injustice (Kauer). According to Kauer, a paradigm shift in the mindsets on the European level is also necessary to consider social housing no longer as a 'charity' but rather as a human right.

Overall, the challenge, thereby, lies in 'scandalising' the housing topic to create the necessary political will for change. A crucial condition for any potential solution to the housing crisis on a European scale is the emergence of a 'coalition of the willing' in the Council. Although such a prospect is all but certain, there are encouraging signs, such as the endorsement in March 2024 of the Liège Declaration calling for a 'European New Deal for affordable and social housing' by all European housing ministers.



Laura Schmeer

FNRS Research Fellow



PhD Contribution

The Future of Social Europe in Question:
Rethinking European Social Citizenship and Defending Gender Equality

Policy Brief by Stephen Gaffney on the keynote session of the IDEAS24 conference

On 15 May 2024, Prof. Dr. Martin Seeleib-Kaiser of the University of Tübingen, and Prof. Dr. Zoe Lefkofridi of the University of Salzburg, delivered two stimulating and topical keynotes at the 2024 edition of the Interdisciplinary Conference on European Advanced Studies (#IDEAS24). Both speakers raised a series of pertinent issues crucial to the future of the social dimension of European integration and linked their observations with clear policy measures.

The chair, Prof. Amandine Crespy of the Centre d'études de la vie politique at the ULB, opened the session by presenting two indicators which demonstrate the extent to which social inequality remains a critical issue across Europe despite the prosperity of the region. In 2022, 95.3 million, approximately 21% of the EU population, were found to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion; while in 2024, UNICEF calculated approximately 20 million children, 1 in 4, are threatened by poverty. She also noted how our understanding of inequality has moved beyond the core issues of income and welfare to become more 'multifaceted' – reflecting the growing diversity of European societies. These observations set the scene for the two keynotes, which addressed respectively the following topics: how we theorise and measure European Social Citizenship, and the growing backlash against gender equality in many EU member states.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPEAN SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP

Martin Seeleib-Kaiser's contribution entitled 'European Social Citizenship in Perspective' interrogated the status of Social Europe in the contemporary era.

The presentation began by grounding the concept of citizenship theoretically, drawing on the work of T.H. Marshall, and that of sociologist and two terms European Commissioner, Ralf Dahrendorf, who argued that social rights 'are the final stone in the arch which holds up the roof of citizenship'.

From this foundation, Seeleib-Kaiser introduced his central argument which called into question the idea whether our contemporary welfare states, or the concept of a European Social Union, can adequately underpin a substantial form of European Social Citizenship. To illustrate his argument, he presented the empirics of two dimensions. Firstly, the high stratification in social rights experien-ced by European citizens who migrate to a-nother Member State, and the relative lack of impact of EU social minima on their lives. Secondly, the stark variance in social rights and outcomes found between Member Sta-tes, as well as at the regional and local le-vels within each State.

In examining the case of social rights for migrant EU citizens, the call was made for a re-think of how to protect those moving from Central and Eastern Europe - both in terms of welfare access and access to the right of free movement. A central point here was the absence of substantive rights for jobseekers arriving from Central and Eastern Europe to Northwestern and Southern Europe. If the right to export social security payment to facilitate job search in another Member State exists, the huge difference in terms of cost-of-living between regions acts tends to nullify this right in practice. Furthermore, recently arrived EU migrants are often unable to access temporary shelter and other support services when facing homelessness.

The keynote then moved to disparities found at the inter- and sub-member state levels in terms of income, employment opportunities and social services. Data on disposable incomes, labour market outcomes, hours worked, and access to childcare revealed stark inequalities, especially when comparing Northwestern Europe with Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. An indicator calculating the share of the population below an EU-wide (rather than the typical national measure) median income poverty threshold was also presented. This further illustrated starkly divergent outcomes across Europe. These contrasting outcomes were argued to undermine the legitimacy of both nation-states and the EU, and call into question the concept of European social citizenship.

In response to these disparities, the recommendation was made to shift the reference point, from the national to the European level, when assessing the realities of social rights within the EU. Furthermore, Seeleib-Kaiser called for establishing European-wide minimum social rights to provide both substance and a future to European Citizenship.

PUSHING BACK AGAINST ANTI-GENDER EQUALITY BACKLASH

Zoe Lefkofridi's keynote entitled 'Democracy and Gender Equality in Times of Backlash: Pushback Strategies' presented the preliminary findings from the Horizon Europe-funded project Push*Back*Lash on which she is principal investigator. The presentation began by noting that while UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, declared in February 2020 that the 21st century must be the 'century of women's equality', developments in the years that followed the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic have put this aspiration in jeopardy.

It is in this context that the Push*Back*Lash project is setting out to investigate forms of 'backlash' against gender equality that have emerged at both citizen and elite levels in many EU Member States and dissect their effects on public debate, democracy, and sustainable development.

It is in this context that the Push*Back*Lash project is setting out to investigate forms of 'backlash' against gender equality that have emerged at both citizen and elite levels in many EU Member States and dissect their effects on public debate, democracy, and sustainable development. This backlash takes many forms: the reframing of debates in a polarising manner, the promotion of 'moral panics', the watering down of commitments and institutions, attacks on legitimacy and authority, or a constriction of the operating space for women's groups and women human rights defenders. Social actors engaging in such behaviour have had various targets including but not limited to reproductive rights, sexual education, LGBTQ rights, anti-hate speech legislation, and the academic discipline of Gender Studies itself. Push*Back*Lash aims to investigate these forms of contestation of gender equality systematically, and in doing so seeks to develop and test counter-strategies.

The presentation put current forms of backlash against gender equality into historical context - with a comparison made to the reactions against earlier advances made by the feminist movement in the 20th century. However, in recent years this phenomenon has interlinked in complex ways with the social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the workplace and the community. For example, 'feminised' sectors of the workforce were more exposed to the impact of both the virus and its economic consequences, and this impact was compounded by the persistently unequal distribution of care and emotional labour in the home. Furthermore, an emphasis was placed on the intersectional dimension of backlash against gender equality. This phenomenon is also entangled with forms of social inequality and discrimination along the lines of racial background, class position, ability status, and other individual and group characteristics. The contribution of the field of disability studies and the 'social model of disability' that refocused public attention towards the 'disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation' was highlighted as a positive example in response to such dynamics.

Fear of the impact of gender equality upon societal power dynamics and economic, cultural and religious factors were identified as the primary motivations for backlash. Knowledge gaps and misconceptions about gender equality and the feminist movement act as accelerating factors. A quartet of policy responses were proposed to tackle this challenge including investment in research to better understand attacks on gender equality; legislative reform and policy advocacy in this area; investment in education and awareness raising through gender-inclusive curricula, empowerment, inclusive language and engagement with men and boys; and grassroots organising to promote and defend feminist ideas and goals.



Stephen Gaffney

Postdoctoral Fellow



Skills for the Wealth of Nations?

INTRODUCTION

The EU institutions' recent initiatives place particular emphasis on equipping people with skills, which would enable them to get good jobs and face the key challenges posed by globalisation and intensified competition. In a narrative where labour force agility and flexibility is touted as the determinant of economic competitiveness, this should come as no surprise. How equitable is this approach?

If 2022 was considered by the European Union as the "Year of Youth", from May 2023 to May 2024, the focus was put on an element deemed essential, especially for the integration of young people into the labour market: skills.

The European Year of Skills has recently concluded, aiming to highlight the role of skills in enhancing competitiveness in the global economy. According to the EU's narrative, the world of work is experiencing rapid and profound changes, which are expected to intensify. Emerging digital technologies and the transition to a carbon-neutral economy will transform jobs; some will disappear or change significantly, while new ones will be created.

The green transition will inevitably bring the destruction of employment in many markets, with job losses in sectors based on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive or automotive industries, that will lead to a need for reconversion of the labour forces. Automation will further reduce jobs, especially those involving routine tasks, accounting for an estimated 10 to 15 percent of job losses. As a result, displaced workers will need to reskill and to convert their labour force, in order to adapt to these changes. Long story short, the EU has positioned skills as the key to achieving both economic and social goals. But how appropriate is such an approach?

This year, the Commission unveiled the Labour and Skill Shortage Action Plan, a strategy following the Val Duchesse Social Partners Summit that took place in January 2024. As the title implies, labour and skill shortages are often used interchangeably, overall focusing on individual issues while simultaneously ignoring structural problems such as austerity policies, low wages, and deteriorating working conditions that underlie the current labour market crisis. The plan fails to link economic governance rules to the necessary funding for increasing staff and improving pay and working conditions. It suggests a work structure aimed solely at maximising output, without looking at the real causes of job shortages.

SKILLS AND MOBILITY: THE COST OF IGNORING THE REAL ISSUES

In a similar vein, the introduction of the Skills and Talent Mobility Package aims to make the EU more attractive to international talents and to facilitate labour mobility. A key component of this package is the EU Talent Pool, a platform that connects EU employers with job seekers globally. This platform covers all types of skills on the so-called "talent ladder", an unfortunate term that implies a categorisation of people as low, medium, or high-skilled workers. Additionally, the EU Talent Pool supports the implementation of Talent Partnerships with non-EU countries, offering mobility for employment or training. Jobseekers who develop their skills through these partnerships would be eligible to receive a Talent Partnership Pass.

The EU institutions present mobility and migration as solutions to labour shortages, implying that sourcing skills globally is the answer. However, this approach raises critical questions: Does Europe truly need to "attract talents" to address labour shortages? Has there been any consideration on brain drain prevention while conceiving such measures? The emphasis on attracting external talents seems to ignore the underlying issues such as improving working conditions, wages, and training within the EU. By focusing on importing skills, isn't the EU simply neglecting the root causes of its labour market crises?

Focusing on attracting third-country nationals with skills needed in the EU promotes a brain-drain approach that fails to address the needs of European workers. In the current climate of tension within EU democracies, where far-right forces exploit divisions among workers based on origin and perceived social benefits for migrants, developing an EU talent pool does not seem an ideal solution. What message does this send to unemployed Europeans and so-called "low-skilled" or "low-talented" migrants and refugees already within the EU? Shouldn't they have equal opportunities and access to decent working conditions?

That's the dark side of open borders and of the premises of a single market. It leads to brain drain from countries like Romania, Poland, Portugal and Italy to other parts of Europe. As Enrico Letta put it in his recent report, "I'd like to build up a single market that is not only the freedom to move, but it's also the freedom to stay." Labour mobility may offer opportunities, but it also weakens certain regions and cannot make up for poor working conditions and pay in both the countries of origin and destination. It should not be a quick fix for employers or an easy way for regions struggling to provide prospects and opportunities for workers and their families.

Succeeding in the green and digital transition means also succeeding in finding solutions for the consequences of the new distributional conflicts in the EU. If the narrative is to put the burden on workers to be prepared to change from one job to another, the EU will probably fall short of expectations.

BEHIND THE VEIL: THE NEOLIBERAL AGENDA

Focusing excessively on skills mismatch is misleading. European companies do not lack skilled European workers, but European workers lack quality job offers. If the European Year of Skills ignores the issues of low wages, precarious contracts and incompatible work-life balance, it will become evident that the burden is being placed on workers.

Skills strategies must be integrated with quality job creation. What sense can it make to have more training, reskilling, or upskilling programs for workers in economically deserted areas with no alternative job opportunities? Workers need quality jobs in the same regions where the effects of economic transitions are felt, or they would be obliged to flee those regions. Skills development is just one tool to achieve sustainable growth, productivity and innovation; it can help but will not solve the labour market conundrum on its own.

What does "skill development" really mean? There is no choral understanding on how such skills are being defined, nor how they are being taught and assessed. Different educational and training programs adopt various methods to integrate these skills, aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment. Education, fundamentally, is a public good. It serves broader purposes beyond merely catering to the immediate and rapidly changing needs of the labour market. The focus on aligning educational outcomes strictly with market demands risks narrowing the scope of education to fit short-term economic needs.

If employers require a highly skilled workforce for specific professions, it is more effective for them to take responsibility for this by investing in specialised training tailored to their unique requirements themselves. This would ensure that workers acquire the precise skills necessary for their roles, rather than placing the burden on educational institutions to predict and meet these specific needs by adapting their curricula to match the volatile demands of the labour market. This way of considering employability is strongly associated with the emergence of a 'market-driven' or 'pragmatic' education.

As the ULB researcher Bastian Kenn has analysed in the first IDEAS panel on European Social Citizenship: Beyond Market VS. Social Citizenship, "skill discourses" are not exclusively constructed around economic imperatives, but the whole narrative speaks to the dimensions of a European citizenship, still conceiving a nexus between education and employment.

Skill development is often presented to increase political participation, to equip learners to take on an active role in society as democratic citizens. Nevertheless, skills are still being considered as commodities required for the functioning of the market, and as prerequisite for entering the labour force. Political actors in the EU construct policy solutions by mediating between answers to economic imperatives and important social institutions, such as democracy, and citizenship. This approach creates a veneer of inclusivity and civic-mindedness but ultimately serves neoliberal goals. Individuals are expected to continuously adapt and invest in their own skill development in order to remain viable in the labour market, and educational policies and programs are increasingly tailored to meet the needs of employers. As Kenn argues, this narrative on skills embodies a form of unapologetic neoliberalism, thinly veiled with social democratic rhetoric that ultimately succumbs to neoliberal priorities.





Katherine Jeffery

MA2 in European Studies

The EU's Just Transition:
Bringing science to the table

INTRODUCTION

Green, fair, just transition: amidst a climate of uncertainty, the European Union has set out to revitalise its shaken economy, and to "leave no one behind". As the EU's grand strategy - the European Green Deal - is being spelt out, environmentalist NGOs, farmers, business associations, and labour unions alike seek to influence legislators, and twist and tweak its fate in their favour. However, subtle semantics too often obscure the hidden power struggles which already shape the EU's economy of the future. The first two days of the IDEAS conference saw high-profile researchers from across Europe gather at the IEE to shed light on the agenda and politics of the EU's Just Transition.

It's a stunt. No, talk is not about the Green Deal here; rather, Clément Fontan captivates the academic audience by nimbly jumping onto a chair in the Salle Gemerek. May we say that never has a presentation on the EU taxonomy been more exciting? In the coming minutes, the professor from UC Louvain will elaborate on the political struggles behind the way the EU classifies investments as "sustainable". Thereby, the Union defines what is commonly referred to as "green finance" (and what not), setting EU-wide criteria and thresholds in that regard. To the dismay of environmental NGOs, this now includes gas and nuclear technologies.

But wouldn't science clearly tell us what helps and what harms the climate? Well, not quite so. Fontan describes the heated debates which saw environmental NGOs and industries opposing each other as "classificatory struggles", in which industries lobbied not to be put on a "red list" and sought backing by member states. Whereas DG FISMA initially managed to water down the criteria posed by the member states, more powerful DGs such as DG AGRI and DG MARE intervened, and DG FISMA successively lost hand of the proposal. Besides public controversy, one NGO ultimately decided to present an alternative taxonomy, and lawsuits were launched by Austria and Luxembourg.

So what happened on the way? Fontan understands the underlying political dynamics as an interplay of "puzzling" and "powering", i.e., the collective problem of formulating a policy and the imposition of preferences over others. The Commission - namely, DG FISMA - initially pursued a strategy of postponing controversial issues (e.g., which technologies to be defined as "sustainable") by framing the taxonomy as a merely technical issue. Nevertheless, controversy erupted in 2021 as industry and member states became aware of the proposal's relevance. Environmental NGOs, heavily invested in the initial drafting, increasingly saw themselves confronted with industry and member states interests. As these NGOs successively lost discursive ground and exited the relevant expert bodies, industrial representatives gained influence. Moreover, powerful DGs such as MARE and AGRI came into play, whereas DG FISMA lost control over a flagship initiative that served to legitimise its young existence. The composition of the expert bodies therefore reflected the outcome of the power struggle, and the answer to what is deemed "sustainable" therefore reflects industries' interests to a much greater extent than in the initial proposal - bearing major implications for future capital flows and investment decisions within the EU.



But let's take a step back to refocus on the social dimension of the Green Deal. The term "Just Transition", despite being rooted in the US workers' movement of the 1970s and 1980s, is at the EU level now interlinked with the motto of "leaving no one behind". This signals an increased intertwining between environmental, climate and social policies, as the socioeconomic impact of the former (i.e. when putting a price on carbon) needs to be addressed. Paolo Graziano, Professor of Political Science at the University of Padova, presented his research on the politics behind what is called "eco-social policies". In particular, he analysed the European Green Deal as the European growth strategy - the mother of recent eco-social policies, so to say - that has been put forward as the flagship initiative of the von der Leyen Commission.

The swift adoption of the strategy, according to the researcher, mainly served to appease critics of the way von der Leyen came into power (remember the debate about the Spitzenkandidatenprinzip, which culminated in a legitimation crisis) and to please the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. In a climate of high politicisation and identity-building, public opinion played a key role in shaping the Commission's agenda. Crafting the European Green Deal was thus motivated by electoral changes and societal demands for policy change, taken to the streets, as exemplified by the Fridays for Future movement. Notwithstanding the scientific evidence - provided, most prominently, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change at UN level - this critical juncture was mainly driven by developments within the EU. Following that line of argumentation, we may wonder how the next Commission will seek legitimacy.

The concept of "Just Transition", as already mentioned, has been appropriated in the European context. However, it was not born in a vacuum, and its use may bear legal implications. So wouldn't it be worthwhile to look at the way the EU advances this concept within its climate law and policy framework? Vilja Johansson, Finnish visiting researcher at the VUB's Brussels School of Governance, shared insights from her PhD studies on this matter. To meet its ambitions under the European Climate Law, the EU has since adopted large parts of the Fit for 55 package, which refers to the target of lowering CO2 emissions by 55% until 2030. Looking, amongst other, at the Just Transition Mechanism and the Social Climate Fund as eco-social policies adopted thereunder, Johansson finds that the Just Transition is framed differently across legal files and thus takes a multidimensional view of the concept. Under the Just Transition Fund, the EU pursues regional justice goals and aims to support the workforce (i.e. by re-skilling), whereas the Social Climate Fund seeks to eradicate poverty and protect vulnerable households (i.e. by direct income support). Compared to its original meaning, the notion of "Just Transition" has thus been broadened within the EU context. Other notions, such as "fair" transition may seek to address sectoral economic imbalances in the transition, and may not necessarily be used interchangeably. Moreover, "Just Transition" may be seen as a guiding principle for future implementation by EU member states. However, its implementation remains uneven across sectors, as it is barely referred to in the EU's framework on land use and land use change (LULUCF), or with regard to the Common Agricultural Policy. What the implications of the old yet novel concept of "Just Transition" mean in practice is yet to be seen.

In a complementary way, Just Transition can be regarded from a political economy point of view. This effort was presented by Tiago Moreira Ramalho, Post Doctoral Researcher at the Université libre de Bruxelles. The author investigated how the concept of "Just Transition" travels within the EU policy arena, and compared it to the promise of green growth under the "Green Transition". Notably, the European Green Deal relied much on green growth, which is meant to transcend trade-offs as it promises to decouple economic growth from resource use. However, he finds ambiguity around the concepts of Green Transition and Just Transition and that actors in the EU have fundamentally different views of the climate crisis and climate policies.

Whereas the green growth discourse is found to be dominant within the EU policy arena, other discourses such as degrowth do not have a tangible impact. The Just Transition, according to him, has followed a logic of compensation. However, it must be asked why a Just Transition is needed if the Green Transition already promises to create green jobs and, arguably, to solve trade-offs. He finds that the notion of a Just Transition serves as a common denominator that brings together actors who wish for deep transformational change and others who merely want to reconfigure growth models. This has become manifest in the hiring of "Just Transition Officers" and the formation of a broad "Just Transition Alliance". However, many of those actors are being funded by the EU and "play by the bureaucratic rulebook" as they step into regular exchange with EU institutions.

Bianca Luna Fabris from the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and University of Edinburgh, and Philippe Pochet, former General Secretary of ETUI, presented a forthcoming chapter on the role and involvement of the trade union movement - on the European level, notably the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) - in the politics of a "Just Transition". The diffusion of the "Just Transition" concept first from the US context to the international level, and, later on, to the EU context, may be seen as a success story. Building consensus on common ideas between ETUC's members, which have different interests, is key in order to shape the European agenda.

A second challenge lies in the integration of those ideas into the European policy debate, e.g. lobbying to bring them onto the agenda. Following the financial crisis in 2009, climate concerns had taken a backseat, but since the Paris Agreement, they have seen a gradual return. As early as 2016, the ETUC started reflecting on a social climate fund, and its commitment to environmental issues has been revived around the Green Deal. The transition requires the ETUC to rethink the concept of work beyond the traditional goals of the organisation. However, the interviewing by the two researchers with those being in charge of environmental issues is still ongoing. The alliance between environmental and trade union actors, we may resume, will seek to play a pivotal role in bringing the EU's Just Transition center stage.

The panels shed light on the Just Transition from multiple angles. What may we take away from that debate? The concept of "Just Transition", and issues surrounding definitions, legal implications, and socioeconomic realities have entered the EU stage only recently. Whereas all reputable political actors acknowledge climate change as a matter of fact, their views regarding the adequate means to tackle this challenge differ significantly, and they may pay varied attention to what climate policy implies for different social groups - including the most vulnerable. During the von der Leyen Commission's (first) term, we have witnessed the rise of climate policy onto the political agenda, taking a distinct eco-social flavour. As the implementation of an array of policies under the European Green Deal is yet to come, negotiations around the meaning of a "Just Transition" and the place that the EU assigns to it will continue to define the trajectory that European societies take towards climate neutrality.



Tim Penninger

MA2 in European Studies

The European Parliament Champions in the Delivery of Social Europe

INTRODUCTION

Speakers: Amandine Crespy and Bastian Kenn from the ULB, Matteo Marenco from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Slavina Spasova from the European Social Observatory (OSE).

The European Parliament, often perceived as a distant institution by many European Union citizens, has emerged steadily as the strongest advocate and driver of social policies across the EU.

The European Parliament has, already before assuming the role of co-legislator, been pivotal in addressing social inequalities, workers' rights, and social justice for the better of millions of EU-citizens. During the IDEAS conference, the panel "Instruments to foster social rights and social security" discussed the "politics of watering down" in the development of Social Europe, as compromises need to be reached in an interinstitutional setting in order to pull through with a sound and fair directive on the platform work. What is more, the issue of a revival of Social Europe is at stake as a new hemicycle has been formed after the European elections in June.

The development of new legislation and the agreements on social policies sometimes touch a key in the interest of member states. The implementation of a directive on platform work, which started back in 2021, was supported unceasingly from the Moncloa during the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. Nevertheless, numerous setbacks arose by blocking minorities formed by Estonia, Greece, France, and Germany who, in February, blocked a previous agreement aimed at standardising the reclassification of platform workers. This led to the legal presumption of employment being diluted, due to the removal of the critical criteria for defining subordination, potentially easing the reclassification of workers.

The diverging opinions between the EU institutions were solved through compromises on the initial proposal, ergo through a "watering down" of the social policy initiative, following hefty interinstitutional debates. Thus, the EU's attempt to establish consistent rules for classifying platform workers as employees has come across significant obstacles, largely due to diverging approaches between the member states. Currently, each country employs its own methods to determine employment status, potentially leading to inconsistent classifications of platform workers across Europe. The directive mandates that member states adopt a presumption of employment concerning employment rights, while excluding tax, criminal, and social security matters, which can be optionally extended. Contrary to initial expectations, the EU has refrained from imposing standardised criteria, granting member states leeway to interpret and implement the presumption independently. This lack of uniformity has sparked concerns about the directive's effectiveness and its broader implications beyond traditional gig economy sectors. After an agreement was reached in April 2024, member states have two years to incorporate the directive into their national legislation.

Amid the digital transformation of the labour market and the impact of platform work on employment relationships, the directive was approved in April 2024 following heated interinstitutional debates. It aims at ensuring that platform workers have their employment status classified adequately, and to correct bogus self-employment, as well as regulate the use of algorithms in the workplace, so no employee is affected by an automated decision-making system. However, the approved directive has suffered a series of modifications that resonate with the process of "watering down", typically attributed to social policies in the European Union. Nonetheless, in the intense debates that have preceded the directive, there is an actor that stood out as champion in defending social justice and fair employment for platform workers: the European Parliament.

The European Parliament has steadily shown an unwavering commitment to advancing social issues and policies and advocating for social justice, even if the EU has only limited competence in the matter. The task to regulate employment and social policies lies almost entirely within the member state governments. It is thus in the governments' discretion to decide on issues such as unemployment benefits, wage regulations, pension systems or the retirement age. However, the European Parliament holds a unique position. It is not only the EU's sole institution chosen through direct elections and thus held accountable by the electorate, but it is also a strong defender of social Europe. This support is exemplified by its history of advocacy for strong and fair legislation, or the endorsement of programs, strategies, and agendas, which set principles for a stronger social Europe, such as the European Anti-Poverty Network. Moreover, social policies have sidestepped political disagreements in the European Parliament. By utilising its powers as a co-legislator, the Parliament has been able to minimise disagreements among political groups over social policy proposals and backed the European Commission's initiatives in this area, putting forward even more ambitious proposals.

In its progressive approach, the Parliament has strongly highlighted the importance of social dialogue. By doing so, it has recognised that an effective and fair regulation requires the input of all actors involved, and has hence encouraged discussions to take place where platform companies, workers, and unions were present. Through the involvement of social partners in the regulatory process, the Parliament's goal has been to address workers' concerns without hindering the innovative labour market that emerged from the birth of platforms such as UBER, JustEat, or Deliveroo. Different stakeholder inputs in the matter of social policies and, in this case, in the matter of platform work regulation, translates into a more contrasted and fair proposal to be put forward to the member states in the Council of the European Union. The Council might thereafter decide not to engage as much in a detailed social dialogue, with the member state governments aiming to protect their own national interests and labour markets. While inputs from national consultations and preparatory work might be considered, direct engagement with social partners like trade unions and employer organisations typically occurs at other stages and mostly within a national context, unlike with the European Parliament or the European Commission.



Rocio Rivera Torrente

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In terms of regulation of platform work, there still exist numerous challenges looking ahead that the European Parliament will surely have to tackle, such as the integration of migrants and refugees into the work force, the further digitalisation of the labour market, and the imperative to ensure sustainable growth while safeguarding civil rights. The Parliament's commitment to social policies and social justice highlights its role as a champion for a fairer, more inclusive Europe. And, although work on these matters still remains to be done, the European Parliament's determination remains a beacon of hope and progress for millions of Europeans.



Assessing EU's market-based approach to equality:

The Role of Servitization in advancing a sustainable Economy

INTRODUCTION

Servitization, the business model that integrates products with accompanying services, is gaining traction as a strategy to foster a more sustainable economy. This approach not only extends the lifespan of products but also reduces material consumption and enhances waste management, contributing to both environmental and social sustainability. However, despite its economic significance, servitization is not merely a trend but a transformative force that intersects with legal frameworks, particularly within the European Union. The panel entitled "Assessing EU's market based approach to equality" part of the second edition of the biennial "Interdisciplinary Conference on European Advanced Studies" at the #IDEAS2024 conference explored the implications of servitization under EU internal market rules, with a focus on the free movement of goods and services, and called for a coherent legal framework to support sustainable development.

A more and more integrated market and competitive growth have ultimately forced companies to change their strategic vision, redefining their tasks, responsibilities and priorities. At the same time, consumers have undergone a process of change that has made them increasingly demanding, aware of their consumption, and in constant search of new types of products. Consequently, companies, alongside the challenges of globalisation, have also had to equip themselves to produce increasingly differentiated products with a high service and value content, redesigning systems in order to guarantee rapid responses to the changes imposed by the market. Živa Šuta, a researcher from the University of Maribor in Slovenia, in her paper entitled "Integration through integrated solutions: applying EU internal market principles to product-service bundles," highlights the necessity of a coherent and harmonised EU framework, which should provide legal certainty for both entrepreneurs and consumers in this changing paradigm.

WHAT EXACTLY IS "SERVITIZATION"?

In the late 1980s, a profound growth in the integration of services into the customer offering began; this phenomenon led some scholars (e.g., Vandermerwe and Rada, 1988) to coin the term "servitization". The term indicates a process that involves "innovation in the capabilities and processes of a company, so that it can better create value - for the customer and for the company itself - by moving from the sale of products to the sale of product-service systems" (Cinquini et al., 2011). In practice, when we speak of servitization of the industries, we are referring to the transformations that companies undergo, modifying their structure, processes and organisation, in order to support the sale of its outputs through the offer of value services, integrated and linked to their initial products.

The change in the product-service paradigm has a huge impact on customers and the market and brings with it a profound transformation at organisational and management level.

From the consumer's point of view, it creates stable and long-lasting relationships, linked by a contract of hire, service, maintenance and a supply of accessories and consumables. It is therefore the basis of a process of constant loyalty between consumer and producer over time. The relationship and focus of the company moves from being product-oriented to being customer-oriented and keeping them customer satisfied.

The pioneers of this new business model are to be found in the world of Information Technology. IBM, for example, was among the first companies to move from selling hardware products to providing IT services. Furthermore, Xerox was one of the first to rent printers together with payment for the cost of printed pages and consumables used. Moving out of the IT sector, Rolls Royce was among the very first international companies to change its business model by introducing the concept of “power-by-the-hour” or “long-term pay-per-use”; promoting the rental and use of its engines against the offer of installation, monitoring and maintenance of services. Another interesting example is that of Candy, a manufacturer of household appliances. The company introduced the “WashPass” concept by offering a washing service with a monthly fee including detergent consumables and maintenance hours instead of simply selling them.

DO PRODUCT-SERVICE BUNDLES FALL UNDER THE PROVISIONS FOR THE FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS OR SERVICES?

The EU's internal market principles, particularly the distinction between the free movement of goods and services, are pivotal in understanding the legal landscape of servitization.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) traditionally employs a dominance approach to distinguish between goods and services. This means that when faced with a product-service combination, the CJEU identifies which element, goods or services, is dominant or primary in the overall offering. The dominant element determines the applicable legal regime and regulatory requirements. For example, if the service component is deemed dominant, the legal provisions governing services will apply, and vice versa for goods. This approach helps to navigate the complexities of product-service bundles within the EU's internal market framework, ensuring that appropriate rules and protections are applied. However, the advent of product-service combinations challenges this dichotomy, raising critical questions that emerged during the IDEAS2024 panel:

1. First of all, do product-service bundles fall under the provisions for the free movement of goods or services? This question is crucial for determining the applicable legal regime and the associated regulatory requirements.

2. Secondly, can existing internal market rules be adapted to accommodate these integrated solutions? If so, how can they be modified to ensure that they support rather than hinder the proliferation of sustainable servitization?

These questions are particularly pertinent to understand how the existing EU legal framework can be adapted to effectively support and promote the servitization model in order to advance a sustainable economy, and what specific legal challenges and opportuniies this adaptation entail.

THE NEED FOR A HARMONISED EU FRAMEWORK

Currently, the EU legal framework, while relatively flexible, lacks specific safeguards to promote sustainable servitization. A coherent and harmonised approach is necessary to provide legal certainty for entrepreneurs and consumers alike. Such a framework would not only facilitate the seamless integration of product-service bundles across Member States, but also ensure that the EU's strategic objectives for sustainable development are met.

For servitization to truly contribute to a sustainable economy, the motivations of both consumers and business owners must align with sustainability principles. This alignment requires first of all educating consumers about the benefits of servitization and providing incentives for choosing sustainable product-service bundles. Furthermore, it is important to encourage businesses to adopt servitization models that prioritise long-term sustainability over short-term profits.

Servitization holds great promise for advancing a sustainable economy, but its success hinges on a supportive legal framework. The EU must strive for a harmonised approach that accommodates the unique characteristics of product-service combinations, ensures legal clarity, and aligns with sustainability objectives. By doing so, the EU can foster an environment where servitization thrives, contributing to both economic growth and sustainable development.

In conclusion, the servitization model, while promising substantial sustainability benefits by extending product lifespans, reducing material consumption, and improving waste management, also raises critical concerns about its broader implications. The integration of services with products inherently fosters dependency, locking customers into long-term relationships with companies. This dependency can often prioritise profit-seeking motives of companies over the genuine provision of value to consumers.

At the #IDEAS2024 panel on “Assessing EU’s market based approach to equality”, discussions highlighted the transformative nature of servitization within the EU market framework. In fact, the critical perception surrounding servitization underscores a dual reality: while it can drive innovation and sustainability, it can also entrench profit-centric business models that may exploit consumer loyalty and dependence. For the EU to exploit the full potential of servitization, a nuanced approach is needed. This involves educating consumers about the benefits and risks, incentivising businesses to adopt genuinely sustainable practices, and ensuring legal clarity to foster a fair and sustainable market environment.



Ludovica Colosimo

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Crise du logement : Quand notre maison brûle

Le 20 février 2024, les représentants du Comité économique et social européen (CESE) appelaient l'Union Européenne à mettre rapidement en place une stratégie pour résorber la crise du logement. Depuis 2020, cette institution plébiscite une réponse ambitieuse et rapide face à ce problème d'ampleur.

La conférence **« Affordable Housing and (In)equality in the European Union »** organisée le jeudi 16 mai dans le cadre des trois journées de discussions IDEAS (Interdisciplinary Conference in European Advanced Studies) était donc l'occasion d'aborder le thème de la crise du logement.

Baisse du nombre de logements disponibles, augmentation des loyers, nécessité de rénover pour respecter les normes environnementales, la pénurie de logements décents à des prix accessibles est une préoccupation grandissante notamment chez les groupes les plus vulnérables, comme les jeunes ou les mères célibataires.

« UN PROBLÈME QUI N'EST PAS TOTALEMENT NOUVEAU »

Pourtant, comme le souligne László Andor lors de la conférence qu'il préside en qualité de secrétaire général de FEPS (ndlr. think tank organisateur) « c'est un problème qui n'est pas totalement nouveau » et dont l'UE a tout intérêt à s'en préoccuper davantage étant donné qu'elle est inclue dans la politique sociale, soit une compétence partagée de l'UE.

D'après Sorcha Edwards, secrétaire générale d'Housing Europe Bruxelles, les chiffres du rapport 2023 de sa fédération montrent que, ces dix dernières années et dans l'UE, le loyer moyen a augmenté de 19 % et le prix des logements de 47 %.

Parallèlement à cette hausse, les revenus des individus subissent une augmentation moins forte, affectant ainsi les foyers les plus modestes.

Les étudiants ou jeunes adultes sont particulièrement touchés, et font le choix ou plutôt n'ont pas d'autre choix que de rester vivre chez leurs parents. D'après une étude d'Eurofound, l'âge auquel au moins la moitié des personnes établies dans l'UE a quitté le domicile de leurs parents est passé de 26 à 28 ans entre 2007 et 2019.

UNE CRISE SOCIALE

Ana Carla Pereira, experte au cabinet du Commissaire à l'Emploi et droits sociaux, Nicolas Schmit, explique qu'un des indicateurs regardés par les institutions européennes est la portion que prennent les dépenses immobilières sur les revenus des citoyens européens. « On considère que la proportion ne devrait pas être supérieure à 40%. Or 10 % de la population générale de l'UE dépense davantage. ».

L'extension du parc immobilier public, soit la construction de nouveaux logements sociaux, permettrait de remédier à une partie du problème en proposant des offres à loyers réduits. C'est ce qu'encouragent les acteurs de la société civile comme Sorcha Edwards. Certaines villes ont d'ailleurs déjà pris des initiatives allant dans cette direction. C'est le cas de Vienne. La capitale autrichienne compte en effet 200 000 appartements appartenant à la ville et au moins 200 000 appartements coopératifs.

Si l'on compare ces chiffres à la ville de Bruxelles, qui certes à une densité démographique inférieure à Vienne (1,2 millions contre presque deux millions pour Vienne) le fossé est énorme. Bruxelles possède seulement 40 000 logements publics sociaux.

« Vienne est une ville modèle au sujet des logements abordables » brandit fièrement Michaela Kauer, policy officer pour la ville de Vienne au sein d'Eurocities, et ce dernier incite l'UE à suivre les politiques autrichiennes en termes de logement. Il faut cependant souligner que Vienne a commencé dès la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale à investir dans le logement social. Elles ont donc bénéficié de temps, or aujourd'hui, le temps manque.

DES FAILLES MULTIPLES…

D'après Michaela Kauer, le faible taux de logements sociaux est une faille du marché qu'il faut corriger. « Le marché ne délivre pas les besoins des citoyens », les logements sociaux par nature ne sont pas des investissements qui produisent de grands bénéfices ce qui n'attire donc pas les investisseurs qui préfèrent placer leur argent dans d'autres types de biens immobiliers. Une façon plus lucrative qui est aussi une cause de la crise du logement est les locations de courte durée telles offertes par la plateforme Airbnb. Dans des villes fortement attractives et visitées comme Paris, ce type de tourisme participe à l'augmentation des prix de l'immobilier car il y a de moins en moins d'offres de location longue ou de vente mais tout autant de demandeurs. Dans une ville où le prix au mètre carré est déjà très élevé, ceux qui n'ont pas les moyens doivent donc vivre en dehors de la ville, quitte à faire des heures de transports en commun dans la journée.

Les acteurs de la société civile comme Michaela Kauer et Sorcha Edwards préconisent ainsi l'intervention de l'UE qui pour l'instant ne voit l'accès à un logement « comme un bien et non pas un droit humain » précise Michaela. Or, la question du logement est liée à d'autres problématiques, comme les ambitions environnementales, ce qui sous-entend que l'UE doit rendre une réponse de fond, et qui peut ne pas faire consensus.



Si la crise du logement est synonyme de tension au sein des institutions bruxelloises, Ana Pereira reste confiante dans le prochain mandat européen, « La magnitude du problème est telle qu'il faut s'attaquer à ce sujet. Peut-être que cela peut se faire par le principe de service que doit assurer le Marché unique européen » lance-t-elle. Car pour l'instant la Commission Européenne comme les autres institutions de l'Union restent assez muettes à ce sujet.

…APPELLENT À DES RÉPONSES DE FOND

Si la Commission Européenne a introduit le concept de nouveau Bauhaus européen (du nom d'une ancienne école d'arts et d'architecture allemande) qui selon leurs mots est un « projet qui vise à accélérer la transformation de divers secteurs économiques, tels que la construction et le textile, afin de fournir à tous les citoyens un accès à des biens circulaires et à moindre intensité de carbone. », on constate que la crise du logement n'est qu'un sujet parmi d'autres auquel il faut, de surcroît, ajouter les ambitions climatiques promises par le Green Deal.

D'après Sorcha Edwards, la question du logement est mise de côté ces dernière année car elle est vue comme un élément « qui se met en travers du chemin des trajectoires de l'UE ». D'abord, la pandémie de Covid-19, puis le début de la guerre en Ukraine a fait exploser les prix de matières premières nécessaires à la construction de nouveaux logements, maintenant il faut respecter les promesses climatiques du Green Deal, or certains types de construction polluent, ce qui explique que le problème ne soit pas pris à bras le corps.

« ON LAISSE LES PERSONNES EN ATTENTE D'UN LOGEMENT SOCIAL ENTRE LES MAINS DE L'EXTRÊME-DROITE »

Il y a pourtant urgence à agir, sur toutes les dimensions du problème du logement y compris le logement social. Les listes d'attentes pour avoir accès à un logement social sont de plus en plus longues, la France a tristement battu son record avec 2,4 millions de foyers attendant un logement social. « On laisse les personnes en attente d'un logement social entre les mains de l'extrême-droite », alarme Michaela Kauer. À la suite des élections européennes qui ont donné de nouveaux sièges aux droites conservatrices et extrême (plus 8 sièges au groupe ECR et plus 14 sièges pour ID selon les projections faites par le Parlement européen le 14 juin), la prochaine Commission a donc tout intérêt à se saisir de la question pour le prochain mandat avant que cette crise sociale devienne une crise politique.



Mahault Meunissier

MA1 en Études Européennes

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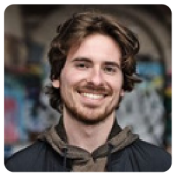
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