

Stream #17

Scarring Effects of the Pandemic: Inequality, Poverty, and Social Policy After COVID-19

Conveners:

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The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health crisis but a profound disruption of societies as a whole. It challenged economic activity, social life, and the well-being of citizens across Europe and triggered swift and far-reaching policy adaptations within welfare states. While the pandemic affected nearly everyone, it is well established that its consequences were highly uneven. Existing social inequalities were often exacerbated, with certain groups experiencing disproportionate risks of job loss, income insecurity, care burdens, and social exclusion. At the same time, many Western countries substantially expanded social protection and poverty-related policies during the crisis. In some cases, these emergency measures even led to higher levels of income protection than in pre-pandemic times. A large body of research has examined the immediate social and economic consequences of the pandemic under these exceptional conditions. However, it remains an open question to what extent the pandemic had lasting effects on inequalities, poverty, and social policy.

This stream focuses on the mid- to long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the acute phase of the crisis has passed, important questions remain regarding its lasting impacts. Possible questions include: To what extent has the pandemic had enduring effects on labour market trajectories, particularly for workers who experienced job loss, reduced working hours, or prolonged inactivity? How have pandemic-related disruptions in education, training, and early career opportunities shaped social mobility and inequality over the life course? Have pandemic-related labour market interruptions led to persistent gender inequalities in earnings, employment stability, and career advancement? Has the pandemic had lasting effects on the perception and/or the composition of the welfare state?

We invite contributions that examine these questions from different disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, political science, economics, and social work. We welcome diverse methodological approaches, such as quantitative, qualitative studies, comparative research, and mixed-methods designs. By bringing together diverse perspectives and approaches, this stream aims to advance our understanding of how the pandemic has reshaped inequalities, poverty dynamics, and social policy in the medium and long run.