

## Stream #21

# The Future of Social Europe: Policies, Outcomes and Political Legitimacy

### Conveners:

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The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), from 2017 aims to enhance social citizenship rights for all citizens via various instruments and thereby to bolster the EU's political legitimacy. One decade after the launch of the EPSR, it is time to assess whether the EU's social initiatives effectively provide value to citizens. Yet, until now, it has not been possible to undertake an in-depth and multi-level analysis of the EPSR due to a lack of data on its impact on national level policy-making and policies, outcomes and political legitimacy.

The literature on whether the EPSR and related initiatives can deliver on its promises is divided: some scholars emphasize the EU's potential to elevate standards across all member states (Ferrera et al., 2023; Kilpatrick, 2023), while others are more sceptical, pointing to ideational elusiveness of Social Europe (Afscharian, 2025), differentiated policy influence (Pircher et al., 2024), and variations in socio economic outcomes (Akarçeşme et al., 2024).

Given this debate and emerging research, it is crucial to theorize the underlying dynamics of EU level social policies, their transposition at the national and regional levels, the resulting outcomes, and the recognition of the EU's social turn by its citizens. It is particularly important to undertake solid analysis on these issues now, given the current era of global insecurity, for the EU and its citizens.

This stream invites contributions that analyse the impact of the EPSR and related initiatives on policies, outcomes and political legitimacy:

- In terms of policies, do EU social initiatives and directives trigger significant policy change at the national level, and do the changes reflect the policy intention, i.e. 'upwards social convergence' of the EU directives?
- In terms of outcomes, do EU policies have a measurable impact on socio-economic outcomes in the EU member states?

- In terms of political legitimacy, do European citizens perceive the renewed focus on the social dimension of European integration, and does this, in effect, strengthen the political legitimacy of the EU?

Addressing these questions in a systematic manner, this stream provides an opportunity to assess the impact of the EU's renewed attention to "Social Europe" from a broad perspective. We welcome paper submissions using different kinds of theoretical and methodological approaches, both qualitative and quantitative.