

Stream #24

Restructuring Welfare Under Pressure: Juridification, Fragmentation and “Wrong-Pocket” Dilemmas

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European welfare states are under pressure to deliver social protection that is both legitimate and effective amid demographic change, shifting expectations, fiscal constraints, and intensified needs for personalised and continuous support. Many systems perform well for large parts of the population across the life course, yet persistent governance frictions risk leaving the weakest behind and eroding support for universalism through dualism, gradual “private exit”, and growing complexity.

This stream focuses on three cross-cutting governance problems that increasingly shape modern welfare states:

- **Juridification:** the expansion and deepening of rights-based governance, legal standards, complaint systems and compliance logics. Juridification may strengthen legal security and equal treatment, but can also produce sharper boundaries, procedural inflation, risk aversion and reduced scope for professional judgement—sometimes undermining person-centred solutions.
- **Fragmentation (“siloed” or “stovepiped” governance):** divisions between sectors (employment, health, education, social services), administrative levels, professions and funding streams that generate broken pathways, transitions and “in-between spaces” where progression is lost.
- **Intertemporal incentive problems (“wrong-pocket” / spend-to-save dilemmas):** prevention, integration and capability-building often require upfront investments, while benefits accrue later and frequently to other budgets or organisations—reducing incentives to scale what works.

We welcome interdisciplinary contributions (social policy, public administration, socio-legal studies, sociology, economics, social work) that analyse these mechanisms and—crucially—identify routes to reintegration and delivery capacity.

Topics include: simplifying rules and reducing administrative complexity; balancing legal security with flexibility and proportionality; integrated service designs (“no wrong door”, one plan, care/activation coordinators, after-care and follow-up); separating benefit administration from service delivery where relevant; partnership governance with employers, municipalities and civil society; data and digital infrastructures that support learning and progression rather than control (including the constraints created by privacy and data governance); and implementation research on how reforms move from policy ideas to drift-ready practice.

The stream explicitly invites comparative and cross-national work on how welfare states can be restructured to deliver under pressure—without sacrificing legitimacy, inclusion and trust.