

Stream #4

Disability, Citizenship, and the Future of the Welfare State in Europe

Conveners:

- Alexandre Calado, ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, CIES
- Edurne García Iriarte, Trinity College Dublin
- Gabor Petri, Central European University, Democracy Institute

In a context where the European Social Model faces profound geopolitical, technological, and political pressures, disability policy emerges as a critical and privileged field of analysis. This stream offers a space to examine how this specific policy domain is being reshaped through cross-cutting contemporary challenges – such as the ambivalent impact of digitalisation, the sustainability of support systems, innovations in rights-based practice, populist policymaking, democratic backsliding or the role of the EU – and, simultaneously, how its conceptual and practical innovations can inform and inspire the broader debate on the future of the welfare state.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by all EU member states, establishes a universal mandate requiring states to transform their policies to ensure full inclusion. Today, its implementation sits at the intersection of external pressures and the internal transformation of the social contract. While fiscal austerity, digitalisation, and the green transition redefine resources and service delivery, the rise of populist forces and shifting consensus on who is “deserving” of protection particularly threaten the social citizenship rights of historically and newly marginalised groups, challenging the very principles of full inclusion. Disability policy acts as a conceptual and practical laboratory for rethinking core notions such as autonomy, dependency, participation, and distributive justice for society as a whole.

We invite contributions that analyse recent developments, dilemmas, and innovations in disability policy across Europe. We seek to understand how macro-trends are shaping pathways to inclusion in areas such as employment, health, education, social protection, deinstitutionalisation, community living and independent living. We welcome studies from various disciplines including sociology, political science, law, economics, social work, and disability studies.

We have particular interest in the perspectives of people with disabilities, their families, their organisations and support networks and on inclusive and participatory research. We also encourage papers that explore the potential of this field to inspire a wider reinvention of the welfare state.

This Stream's core questions will explore how inclusion is shaped across these key policy domains and what lessons these transformations hold for the broader welfare state. By bringing together an interdisciplinary perspective, this stream aims to place disability policy at the heart of the urgent debate on the resilience and future of European social citizenship.