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Introduction

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Eu Social Cit

European Social Citizenship

The State of European Social Rights and European Social Citizenship

Edited by

Maarten Keune

Flagship Report 1

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1. Introduction The State of European Social Rights and European Social Citizenship

Maarten Keune

1.1 Introduction

The past half century has brought profound transformations to European societies: the deepening of globalization and greater EU integration, the rise of the service and knowledge-based economy, the fourth technological revolution, growing migration flows and rapid socio-demographic changes including the gender revolution (Wren, 2012; Hemerijck, 2013; Bourguignon, 2015; Mahutga et al., 2017; Diamond, 2019). Against this backdrop of ‘slow moving’ trends, three crises have emerged in the past two decades, posing additional social challenges. The post-2008 crisis and the ensuing Great Recession confronted Europe with declining incomes, rising inequality and poverty, increasing precarious work, the reduced capacity of welfare systems to secure economic and social stability, and divergence rather than convergence in prosperity (Eurofound, 2018; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). More recently, the COVID-19 crisis paralyzed large parts of the economy and again strongly affected jobs, incomes and inequality between social groups and between EU countries. And thirdly, the climate change crisis is becoming more and more apparent and poses its own social challenges as to how to assure that economic activity, jobs and welfare are aligned with the need to halt climate change and the exhaustion of natural resources.

All of these developments have affected the welfare and wellbeing of European citizens. Throughout Europe, individuals, families, social groups and territories have been variously exposed to sudden and often unforeseen situations of need and insecurity. While traditional protection systems continue to provide basic essential needs (e.g. protection against illness, injury and disability), many (old and new) risks are not adequately addressed. These developments are generating widespread social problems and political anxieties, including radicalization and skepticism in public opinion towards institutions, politics and the EU (Manow et al., 2018).

Our current predicament shares a number of features with the big Social Question of the late nineteenth century which followed capitalist industrialization. Karl Polanyi (1957) famously dubbed it the ‘Great Transformation’, whose ‘first movement’ – the process of market making – thoroughly disrupted established patterns of work-family-community relations. To withstand disruption, European societies reacted to protect themselves in new forms, eventually establishing the modern welfare state. Our current era is witnessing the emergence of what can be considered a new Social Question in Europe,

reproducing under new guises the double challenge of economic disruption and social/ institutional reconstruction. The Europeanisation of national markets through freedom of movement and competition rules has fostered growth and job creation. But it has also become a source of social disruption. The EU has gradually responded to this social disruption, developing its 'social dimension'. This social dimension and the social rights attached to EU citizenship for a long time remained limited, weak and poorly visible, primarily affecting mobile workers/citizens by granting them access to the domestic labour markets and social security systems of all member states.

The 2017 proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) substantially broadened and deepened the EU's ambitions concerning social rights and European social citizenship, signaling the desire to find a new balance between economic objectives and social concerns. At the same time, the EPSR as such does not create new social rights and it raises questions about its status, both conceptually as a foundation of 'European social citizenship' and as an agenda for concrete policy initiatives.

The EuSocialCit project has in the past 4 year done extensive research with the aim of getting a better understanding of the recent developments of European social rights and European social citizenship, the role of the EPSR in this process and the respective impact on the wellbeing of (different groups of) EU citizens. Also, we wanted to increase our comprehension of how EU social rights and social citizenship can be strengthened to effectively improve the lives of EU citizens. To this effect EuSocialCit set out to (i) develop a novel, resource-based, multi-level concept of social rights and empirically verify this concept; (ii) study the current state of social rights in the EU, their relationship to social outcomes (e.g. social inequality, gender inequality, poverty, precariousness) and gaps in their functioning; (iii) diagnose the shortcomings of the existing institutional structure that generates undesirable outcomes in terms of empowerment, fair working conditions, social inclusion and gender equality; and (iv) understand the social and political demand for change among citizens, their attitudes and preferences, and the constraints and opportunities these demands, attitudes and preferences create for advancing the EU social agenda.

In this flagship report we present the main outcomes of this research. It is complemented by two other reports, one presenting an outlook to the future as well as a series of policy recommendations concerning the further development of European social rights and social citizenship (Ferrera 2024) and one presenting the project's finding related to gender and gender inequality (Magda and Chłoń-Domińczak (2024)).¹

To contextualize the chapters of this report, in the next section a brief discussion of the EPSR will be provided, discussing the extent to which it has indeed become a turning point in the social role of the EU

¹ For the complete collection of papers produced by EuSocialCit see <https://www.eusocialcit.eu/results/> and <https://zenodo.org/communities/eusocialcit/records?q=&l=list&p=1&s=10&sort=newest>

and the provision of social rights to EU citizens, as well as the questions it raises concerning the impact on the lives of EU citizens. Section 3 then sets out the structure and the themes of this report.

1.2 The EPSR and the revival of Social Europe

The European Pillar of Social Rights was introduced by Commissioner Juncker and proclaimed in 2017. It presents 20 principles divided into three areas: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion. The EPSR does not create new social rights nor new competences at the EU level, it rather represents an overview of the social values that are considered important in the EU. In that sense it is more a guide than a rulebook. It therefore runs the danger of being another empty declaration on the importance of social rights without substantial practical implications.

This does however not seem to be the case. The EPSR has become an important signal that Social Europe and social rights are back on the EU agenda and has repoliticized and revitalized the EU social policy arena (Vanhercke et al. 2018; Kilpatrick 2023). In spite of not being legally enforceable, it has become the reference point for a whole new series of EU social rights and social policy (Aranguiz 2022; Keune and Pochet 2023; Dura 2023). The years since the adoption of the EPSR are first of all characterized by a high number of such new initiatives, at a much greater speed than in previous times (Kilpatrick 2023). The social *acquis* has also been expanding in terms of the subject matters it covers, moving far beyond its traditional focus on health and safety, non-discrimination and cross-border mobility to presently include issues like minimum wages, minimum income, food aid and work-life balance (Keune et al. 2023).

In addition, since the adoption of the EPSR there has been a diversification of the types of instruments used in the creation of social rights (Keune et al. 2023). On the one hand we see that after years of mainly soft governance, hard EU social legislation through new social Directives is again amply used. Examples here are the Minimum Wage Directive, the Work Life Balance Directive and the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions. On the other hand, a number of new, hybrid forms of multilevel governance have emerged, in which EU funds are offered for national or local social policies, but with important conditionalities attached to it. Examples here are the various guarantees that have emerged (Youth Guarantee, Child Guarantee, Skills Guarantee), the above-mentioned Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) programme, or the funds made available for social policy under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Altogether, through these new programmes the EU has allowed for massive public investment in social policy in the member states.

Finally, a series of innovations have been made to integrate social rights, social indicators and the EPSR into EU economic governance (Keune and Pochet 2023), including a partial but progressive socialization of the Semester through expansion of the social scope and ambition of the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in 2011–2016 (Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018) and the tying together of large governance architectures such as the Pillar, the Semester and the RRF (Bekker, 2022; Corti and Vesan,

2023). In this way, the principles and implementation of the EPSR are becoming part of the objectives of the European Semester, the CSRs and the RRF. What is more, during the COVID-19 crisis, the limits on public expenditure of the Stability and Growth Pact were (temporarily) suspended in favour of social spending in the member states, allowing them to finance social and employment policy and creating an interesting precedent for future crises.

From this brief analysis it clearly follows that the EPSR represents a turning point in EU social rights and social policy. In its wake EU social rights and social policy have increased quantitatively, while their substantive coverage was extended and the types of instruments used diversified. Also, the EPSR has to some extent been integrated into the EU economic governance. A series of important questions remain however. One is if EU social rights, pre and post-EPSR, effectively improve the lives of citizens. The existence of a right is in itself not enough in this respect, rights should also be accessible and enforceable. Think for example of the persistent problem of the non-take up of social rights (van Oorschot 1991; Janssen and van Mechelen 2022).

A second question is how balanced EU social rights are across the thematic areas of the EPSR, to what extent they address the most pressing social problems in the EU and what dimensions of the EPSR should get priority for further action. For example, Copeland (2023) shows that it is the area of social inclusion, and in particular that of poverty, that has not received sufficient attention and is treated as a 'third order priority', even though poverty remains high. Similar observations can be made concerning housing, an increasingly important source of poverty and social exclusion (Dewilde 2022). This is much less the case for employment and social investment. The same questions can be asked concerning social groups and member states. Do EU social rights work towards the basic EU goal of upward social convergence within and between member states or do certain groups or member states benefit more than others?

A third question concerns what the citizens think of EU social rights, which ones they find more and which less important, where they see a role for the EU and where not, etc. The debate about the EPSR and related social rights and policies largely takes place among political elites at the EU and national level. Much less is known about the views of the citizens, even though they are both the consumers of social rights and as voters play a key role in the way social rights are developed.

And finally, there is the question if the EPSR will remain as influential in the future as it has been in recent years. It seems to represent a rather robust and well-accepted framework that actors may continue to draw upon to foster EU social rights in the future. At the same time, its non-binding nature makes it dependent on the politics of the moment and vulnerable to being sidelined.

1.3 The structure and themes of this report

To address the questions raised in the previous two sections, the remaining eleven chapters of this report present the research of EuSocialCit. In chapter 2, Maurizio Ferrera, Francesco Corti and Maarten Keune present a novel, multi-level, power resource-based conceptualization of EU social rights that considers a social right as a bundle of three types of individual power resources: normative, instrumental and enforcement power resources. These three power resources are needed for the concrete fruition of the content of social rights by individuals. In chapter 3, Maurizio Ferrera and Federico Bruno discuss the extent to which the EU social rights that emerged after the adoption of the EPSR introduce these three types of power resources or fail to do so. In chapter 4, Federico Bruno and Simon Kuijpers further develop the concept of instrumental power resources, the most innovative aspect of the conceptualization presented in chapter 2 and crucial for making social rights accessible to citizens.

In chapter 5, Caroline de la Porte and Zhen Im analyze the implementation of the EU's Work-Life Balance Directive in five member states, the extent to which this implementation offers instrumental resources to right holders, and how differences between countries concerning the availability of instrumental resources affect the actual take up of parental leave. In chapter 6, Zhen Im, Janine Leschke and Laura Scheele discuss the normative (legal) and instrumental power resources available to platform workers in Spain and the Netherlands and how the differences in their availability affect the fairness of working conditions. And in chapter 7 Brian Burgoon, Marius Busemeyer and Gianna Maria Eick present a quantitative analysis of the relationship between the three types of power resources and the take up of social rights, social spending and social outcomes, focusing on the social-rights realms of worker unemployment and employment.

In chapter 8, Bea Cantillon, Sumeyra Akarçesme and Ane Aranguiz address the question if the focus of the current EU social rights and social policy approach on employment and gender equality is instrumental for delivering on the 2030 poverty and social inclusion targets, or if it requires stronger attention to social protection. In chapter 9, Ruta Ubarevičienė and Jolanta Aidukaitė discuss the social challenges related to housing in the EU as well as the way in which national and EU policies succeed in strengthening housing rights and ensuring housing availability, affordability and adequacy, in particular for the less well off. In chapter 10, Cinzia Alcidi scrutinizes the tangible impact of the evolving EU approach to social investment on the social rights of European citizens and, consequently, their empowerment, focusing in particular on investment in Early Childhood Education and Care.

In chapter 11, Marius Busemeyer, Gianna Maria Eick and Brian Burgoon study citizens' views on the European social rights and social citizenship and what role they see for the EU in social policy. Finally, in chapter 12, Maarten Keune presents conclusions.

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