

Justice and Fairness in Europe: Coping with Growing Inequalities and Heterogeneities

Abstract:

Over the last few decades, European societies have witnessed unprecedented increases in social inequalities. European welfare models, faced with more flexible labor markets, more open trade, skill-biased technological changes, and major socioeconomic structural changes, have been unable to prevent such increases. These structural developments challenge not only the established strategies for resolving distributional conflicts and the normative conceptions used to justify the distribution of goods and burdens in a society, they also affect the acceptance of political and societal institutions and European societies' prosperity and capacity for innovation. The model proposed in the article was developed by an interdisciplinary team consisting of senior scholars and of young researchers who have expertise in empirical justice research and comparative survey methods. Conceptually, the module is premised on the traditional distinction of four dimensions of politics: what outcomes are allocated or distributed unequally, such as income, wealth, and educational degrees (distributive justice); how are they allocated (procedural justice); who is part of the solidary community and can make claims (scope of justice); and when do costs and benefits of redistribution have an impact on a society (intergenerational justice)? In each of these areas people have perceptions, normative expectations, and evaluations of "what is." In providing comparative attitudinal data on these issues, the module covers four major political challenges of European societies: coping with increasing economic and educational inequalities; building widely accepted political and societal institutions; integrating migrants into existing social structures; and ensuring ecological and social sustainability.

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