

Perceptions of Inequality and Justice in Europe

Project number: K248/2019

Executive Summary

The PIJE project successfully brought together international scholars to conduct empirical social justice research using the European Social Survey's "Justice and Fairness" module, producing 14 peer-reviewed articles and 5 public-facing publications despite COVID-19 disruptions that shifted collaboration from in-person to digital formats. The project advanced understanding of justice attitudes across Europe through research on income fairness, gender equality, workplace justice, and redistribution preferences, while also developing methodological contributions and disseminating findings to policymakers and the public through various media outlets, ultimately supporting the career development of junior researchers who have continued in academic positions.

1. Achievement of objectives and milestones

The objective of the PIJE project is to bring together international scholars of social justice research to conduct empirical justice research on the questionnaire module "Justice and Fairness" that was fielded as part of the ninth wave of the European Social Survey as well as other data sources on justice attitudes. Important milestones that have been reached include the publication of **14 peer-reviewed journal articles and 5 additional publications in non-peer-reviewed outlets of which four are explicitly aimed at disseminating research findings from the project to the general public**. Another important milestone is the implementation of regular project meetings bringing together new and old collaborators of the projects' network of justice scholars. Due to the regulations passed in response to COVID-19, funds earmarked for workshops, project meetings and research stays were utilized to a lesser extent in the first years of the project. Yet, since digital collaboration became the new normal during the pandemic years, the project may even have benefited from the pandemic, as colleagues at different institutions and in different countries were just as far away as those in the same institution. Using these collaborative practices extensively, a number of collaborative research projects have been initiated, many of which are already published. In addition to the substantive research questions defined in the project proposal, a number of methodological contributions to the literature could also be made. Another aim of the project was to advance research stays of young scholars with more established researchers in the field, which was avidly used by some project members, yielding fruitful research collaborations. In the final phase of the project, the junior researchers used money leftover due to limited travel abilities during Covid and the subsequent digitalization of collaboration and collected additional data, to investigate the nexus between justice attitudes and support for gender equality policies thereby moving the research agenda forward, from pure attitudes to politically relevant decisions and behavior.

Finally, a large focus of the project has been on making the results of the research projects accessible to the broader public, using all kinds of media outlets, ranging from written documents, to teaching materials, audio and video formats. Since the pandemic has become endemic, a combination of in-person meetings with online-collaboration tools has proven to be most resource efficient way to achieve the substantive goal of the project.

2. Activities and obstacles

The global pandemic in February 2020 dramatically altered the project's in-person collaboration plans, prompting a shift to online meetings. . **Project Meetings**, which aimed to foster the exchange of ideas and discussion of ongoing research projects, were shifted online. The team discovered that more frequent, shorter half-day online sessions with up to four presentations and virtual coffee breaks were more productive than the originally planned two annual 2-day workshops in the online format. These more regular online meetings were supplemented with **monthly seminars** for detailed paper discussions and bi-weekly PhD calls to enhance collaboration among junior researchers. Junior researchers in the project were further supported by organizing a two-day **methods summer-school** on "Causal Analyses using Cross-Sectional Data" conducted in-person in 2021. As pandemic restrictions eased, in-person meetings resumed. The project team further **organized and chaired panels at major conferences** relevant to the field including the In_Equalities Conference in Konstanz (2022, 2024), ESRA Conference (2023), and ESS User Conference in Lisbon (2024), where project member Jule Adriaans delivered the **keynote**, significantly raising the project's visibility. All meetings featured ongoing research presentations and new idea discussions, with invited external experts—including representatives from "normative economics"—broadening the group's perspective and advancing individual projects that bridge traditional survey-based and novel normative-based empirical justice research.

Pandemic travel restrictions necessitated a cost-neutral project extension to utilize unspent funds for research stays. During the project extension, Cristóbal Moya conducted three collaborative visits: to Universidad Central de Chile (November-December 2023) with Ismael Puga and Monica Gerber investigating legitimation mechanisms in contexts of widespread unfairness perceptions; to LSE's International Inequalities Institute (April-May 2024) with Armine Ishkanian examining public policy strategies regarding diverse European justice profiles; and to University of Massachusetts Amherst (May 2024) with Donald Tomaskovic-Devey studying organizational inequality evaluations, particularly gender and racial fairness perceptions.

Intensive digital collaboration through web-based tools like Zoom and Overleaf for real-time document editing was maintained after the pandemic restrictions, with the pandemic arguably leveling the playing field by making distant colleagues as accessible as local ones. This hybrid online-offline approach proved most resource-efficient, reducing travel organization time to allow more focus on substantive work and leaving funds for experimental data collection for precise causal effect estimation, while meeting sustainability guidelines of the Leibnitz Association and Federal Government's Climate Protection Program 2030, including July 2021 Federal Travel Expenses Act amendments.

3. Results and successes

Peer-reviewed articles have already been published in almost all of the substantive research areas defined by the working packages. We briefly describe their main contributions to the literature as well as how they relate to the working packages defined in the project proposal.

The research group published a joint study (**Adriaans et al., 2020**) mapping normative views on fair allocation of goods and burdens, income fairness, life chances, and political procedures across 27 European countries as part of the ESS topline results series. This publication serves both the **Mapping of Justice Attitudes (WP1)** and **Dissemination of Results (WP5)** working packages, being available in six languages, with results presented by PIs Liebig and Kittel at an ESS online launch event. Drawing on the same data source **Kalleitner & Bohmann (2023)**, introduce the "Inequity Z" to show that people across Europe widely agree that bottom incomes are unfairly too low and top incomes are unfairly too high, while perceptions of one's own income fairness increase with personal earnings, and demonstrate that perceived inequity intensifies with actual income inequality. Also contributing to WP1 **Moya and Adriaans (2022)** combine several measures of perceived justice from the ESS data into "justice profiles" and

described their variation across Europe. One implication of their findings is that policymakers should address the widespread concern about social justice and consider where injustice is perceived in the income and wealth distributions when designing policies (WP4).

In a more general sense of the word “mapping” two publications locate justice attitudes in the sphere of individual well-being: **Bohmann and Kalleitner** (under review) investigated associations between perceived income justice and life-satisfaction. Their findings align with **Adriaans (2023)** in *European Sociological Review*, who showed that perceived underreward and overreward systematically related to lower life-satisfaction.

In a peer-reviewed article that was published in *European Societies* **Adriaans and Targa (2022)** can show that, contrary to the hypothesis that females are more satisfied with their incomes compared to men documented in previous research women actually report more intense levels of perceived unfairness, in 15 out of the 28 analyzed countries. Nevertheless, they do not request a higher markup on their unfair earnings. These findings are replicated and extended by research from **Brüggeman and Hinz (2023)** published in *European Sociological Review*. Brüggeman and Hinz find that European women tend to evaluate their own earnings as more unfair as the share of woman in the occupation increases. Hence, women no longer seem to rely only on other woman within the same occupation as referents to assess own earnings. In line with this interpretation, fairness of earnings among women was found to decrease as the occupational gender-pay gap increased. Taking several contextual factors into account, this study also contributes to **the second working package**, which considers **procedural and regional determinants of justice attitudes (WP2)**. Another study within the project that investigates the relevance of the workplace as a contextual factor has been published in *Social Psychology Quarterly*. The authors **Adriaans, Sauer and Moya (2023)** find that relative proportionality in the employer-employee relationship was more strongly associated with pay justice than with pay-satisfaction, with the latter depending more on livings standards and private pay comparisons. This study contributes to the general aim of the PIJE project as it clarifies the unique nature of justice attitudes, distinguishing it from related evaluations of satisfaction. **Bohmann and Liebig (2022)** are also concerned with perceived justice in the occupational context and map individuals' perceptions of the fairness of their chances to find a job across Europe (WP1) and discuss country-level determinants of these perceptions (WP2). They find that chances are perceived as less fair in countries where unemployment is higher, and a higher share of workers has fixed-term contracts or works part time against their will. They also show that that perceived chances on the labor market are strongly related to satisfaction with democracy. Hence this publication also contributes to fourth working package, which concerns the nexus of **justice and political attitudes (WP4)**.

Adding to the third working package on **dynamics of mobility and justice attitudes (WP3)**, **Adriaans & Eisnecker (2023)** investigate drivers of fairness perceptions, finding that one's own pay history did not shape just earnings, while higher occupational and partners' earnings were associated with higher just earnings. **Bohmann and Targa (2022)** describe in their Weekly report how feelings of being part of a discriminated group have changed over time and across Europe thus also contributing to a mapping of justice attitudes (WP1). According to their findings, more and more women, in particular women with a migration background, perceive themselves to be part of a discriminated group. Increases in such perceptions are relevant, as in many cases, legal action against discrimination requires a sensitivity towards it in the first place. **Adriaans, Sauer & Wrohlich (2025)** utilize a factorial survey experiment in Germany to demonstrate that while there is no gender gap in perceived fair earnings for young hypothetical workers, this gap widens with increasing age because male workers receive a higher age premium than female workers, likely due to societal expectations regarding continuous professional growth for men and anticipated career interruptions for women.

For the fourth working package, on the nexus of **justice and political attitudes (WP4)**. **Kalleitner & Bobzien (2024)** demonstrate that income-stratified perceptions of tax progressivity explain differences in support for tax changes between rich and poor. **Kalleitner, Schlogl & Bobzien (2025)** found that individuals prefer higher welfare benefits for low-income

recipients and those on short-time work. Contributing to WP4 are also two projects started at the end of the funding period, on justice attitudes towards **Carbon Pricing** and **Gender Equality policies**, both of which are based on experimental data and are still to be published.

While the project proposal did not include a working package devoted to **methodological research**, the project team has produced some papers that offer a more methodological focus. These papers contribute to the overarching aim of the research project by ensuring that the substantive analyses are based on robust and rigorous measures of justice. A peer-reviewed article published in Social Justice Research by **Adriaans, Liebig, Sabbagh, and Jasso (2021)** investigates whether the evaluation of earnings for self and others systematically differs, depending on whether the item refers to just, fair, or appropriate earnings. **Adriaans and Fourré (2022)** in Measurement Instruments for the Social Sciences investigated psychometric properties of the ultra-short Basic Social Justice Orientations Scale that was implemented in the ESS module. **Moya & Adriaans (2024)** evaluate common measurement approaches for justice evaluations of earnings in European surveys, concluding that expressed justice measures (rating scales) are preferable due to lower nonresponse rates and more consistent correlation patterns compared to experienced justice measures, which are severely undermined by nonresponse to income questions. Moreover, **Nießen, Adriaans, Liebig & Lechner (2023)** developed and validated the Justice Evaluation of the Income Distribution (JEID) scale to measure individuals' subjective assessments of *actual* earnings differences by providing concrete income information for five groups at various segments of the distribution, thereby identifying three robust response patterns: "inequality averse", "bottom-inequality averse", and "status quo justification".

Transfer and Dissemination (WP5): The project successfully disseminated findings through multiple channels targeting diverse audiences. Before the funding period began, the team hosted a [Berlin Lunchtime Meeting](#) during Berlin Science Week, presenting initial results and featuring project partners' work on needs-based justice to representatives from politics, media, and the interested public.

Adriaans and Liebig (2021) contributed a [chapter](#) on perceived income justice in Germany and Europe to the annual Data Report, a non-technical data-based report on key social-welfare indicators published by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) and freely available to the general public. PI Prof. Stefan Liebig developed [teaching materials](#) on social justice for upper-secondary level education jointly with Sabine Gans, also freely available through the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

For "Social Justice Day" 2022, DIW devoted an entire Wochenbericht [issue](#) to PIJE project findings, accompanied by a [press release](#). As DIW's flagship publication, the Wochenbericht targets policymakers, journalists and the general public through an editorial process ensuring accessibility to non-academic readers and clarifying political and practical relevance. The issue featured three non-technical research reports on perceived discrimination, equality of opportunity perceptions in the labor market, and general justice profiles across Europe, framed by an editorial and interview (also published as audio). A short [video](#) explaining main findings was published on DIW's YouTube channel, and two reports were translated into [English](#). Project results were also presented in German to the general public during the [Berlin Long Night of Science](#) 2023, and the project's insights informed discussions at another DIW [Lunchtime Meeting](#) on social mobility and equality of opportunity jointly with the OECD Berlin Center.

Dissertations: All PhD students who received funding from the grand or who benefited from the grand via the network have successfully submitted and defended their PhDs and all have found employment in academic institutions including the European University Institute, DIW Berlin, LMU Munich, University of Rome III and Bielefeld University, continuing research on the topic and continuing collaboration.

4. Equal opportunities, career development and internationalization

In terms of **equal opportunities**, two researchers identifying as female have been employed for the project; one on post-doctoral level, the other on PhD-level. In terms of **internationalization**, the project employs one international PhD-researcher with project funds. In general, given its collaborative and international outlook the PIJE project brings together scholars from an international audience with regular project members from institutions in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Spain, and the United States as well as creating networks between researchers of various career stages (including post-doc and PhD-level). As part of the project, DIW was also able to host a research intern (pre-doc) from France who during her stay in Berlin was able to conduct work on a research project resulting in co-authorship on the published contribution (Adriaans & Fourré, 2022). Young researchers from DIW as well as the partner institutions have received in-kind support in form of the **PhD Methods Summer School** as well as travel costs to **support participation in conferences and workshops**.

5. Structures and collaboration

As intended by the initiators, regular project meetings and workshops strengthened and intensified the collaboration between DIW, the “Politics of Inequality” Cluster of Excellence (PI: Prof. Thomas Hinz – University of Konstanz), the FOR14 Project (PIs: Stefan Traub – HSU Hamburg and Prof. Bernhard Kittel – Vienna University), as well as further key figures in empirical justice research, including Prof. Guillermina Jasso – New York University; and Prof. Clara Sabbagh – University of Haifa. Several of the research projects listed have been co-authored by individuals from different institutions.

Personnel changes and changes in Governance: PI Stefan Liebig has left DIW but continues his work at FU Berlin. Sandra Bohmann is now coordinating the project’s activities at DIW. Jule Adriaans left the DIW for a post-doctoral position with the project partner Prof. Dr. Carsten Sauer at Bielefeld University. Matteo Targa has left DIW for a postdoctoral position at University of Rome III. He is replaced by Cristóbal Moya, who has previously been part of the project team.

6. Quality assurance

In line with good scientific practice, source codes have been published on freely and publicly accessible open science platforms for five scientific articles. Twelve out of fifteen scientific articles are open access. No animal testing has been conducted as part of this project.

7. Additional resources

During the reporting period, the PIJE project was supported by Prof. Stefan Liebig (former PI and Director of the SOEP) with approximately 1.6 person-months.

8. Outlook

Research: A paper on the nexus of migration and justice-attitudes is still under way. Moreover the junior researchers have gathered novel experimental data on the impact of informing individuals about different forms of the gender pay gap on their fairness attitudes and subsequent support for different political measures aimed at reducing the gender pay gap. In this way, the junior researchers have moved one step forward, connecting attitudes with politically relevant behavior. Junior researchers keep the biweekly meetings and continue their collaboration, currently planning for future joint applications for research funds.

Appendix: List of Publications by Working Package

Methodological Contributions:

- Adriaans, J., & Fourré, M. (2022). Basic social justice orientations—Measuring order-related justice in the European Social Survey Round 9. *Measurement Instruments for the Social Sciences*, 4(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42409-022-00040-3>
- Adriaans, J., Liebig, S., Sabbagh, C., & Jasso, G. (2021). What's in a Word? Just vs. Fair vs. Appropriate Earnings for Self and Others. *Social Justice Research*, 34(4), 397–427. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-021-00380-1>
- Moya, Cristóbal, und Jule Adriaans. 2024. „Assessing the Measurement Quality of Justice Evaluations of Earnings in Europe“. *Social Justice Research* 37(4):335–65. doi:[10.1007/s11211-024-00441-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-024-00441-1).
- Nießen, Désirée, Jule Adriaans, Stefan Liebig, und Clemens M. Lechner. 2023. „Justice Evaluation of the Income Distribution (JEID): Development and Validation of a Short Scale for the Subjective Assessment of Objective Differences in Earnings“ herausgegeben von S. Brito-Costa. *PLOS ONE* 18(1):e0281021. doi:[10.1371/journal.pone.0281021](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281021).
-

Working Package 1: Mapping of justice attitudes:

- Adriaans, J., Bohmann, S., Targa, M., Liebig, S., Hinz, T., Jasso, G., Kittel, B., et al. (2020). Justice and Fairness in Europe: Topline Results from Round 9 of the European Social Survey (ESS Topline Results Series, 10). London: City University London: ESS ERIC. https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/ESS9_toplevels_issue_10_fairness.pdf
- Adriaans, J. (2023). Fairness of earnings in Europe: The consequences of unfair under- and overreward for life satisfaction. *European Sociological Review*, 39(1), 118–131. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcac044>
- Adriaans, J., & Targa, M. (2023). Gender differences in fairness evaluations of own earnings in 28 European countries. *European Societies*, 25(1), 107–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2083651>
- Moya, C., & Adriaans, J. (2022b). Justice Profiles in Europe: Major Differences in Evaluation of Inequality. DIW Weekly Report. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_DWR:2022-9-1
- Moya, C., Adriaans, J. & Sauer, C. 2023. „Unjust Income Inequality Prevails Across 29 Countries“. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 9. doi:[10.1177/23780231231171581](https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231171581).
- Kalleitner, F., & Bohmann S. 2023. „The Inequity Z: Income Fairness Perceptions in Europe across the Income Distribution“. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 9. doi:[10.1177/23780231231167138](https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231167138).
- Bohmann, S., & Kalleitner, F. (2023). Subjective Inequity Aversion: Unfair Inequality, Subjective Well-Being, and Preferences for Redistribution. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/g8arw>

Working Package 2: Procedural and regional determinants of justice attitudes

- Adriaans, J., Sauer, C., & Moya, C. (2023). Pay Justice and Pay Satisfaction: The Influence of Reciprocity, Social Comparisons, and Standard of Living. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 019027252311516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01902725231151671>

- Bohmann, S., & Liebig, S. (2022). Knapp ein Drittel der EuropäerInnen zweifelt an Chancengerechtigkeit auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. DIW Wochenbericht. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_WB:2022-7-3
- Brüggemann, O., & Hinz, T. (2023). Do women evaluate their lower earnings still to be fair? Findings on the contented female worker paradox examining the role of occupational contexts in 27 European countries. *European Sociological Review*, jcac073. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcac073>

Working Package 3: Dynamics of social mobility and justice perceptions

- Bohmann, S., & Targa, M. (2022b). Women Increasingly Identifying as Part of a Discriminated Group. DIW Weekly Report. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_DWR:2022-5-1
- Bohmann, S., & Targa, M. (2022a). Frauen sind für Diskriminierung sensibler geworden. DIW Wochenbericht. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_WB:2022-7-2
- Eisnecker, Philipp Simon, und Jule Adriaans. 2024. „How Do My Earnings Compare? Pay Referents and Just Earnings“. *European Sociological Review* 40(1):129–42. doi:[10.1093/esr/jcad002](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcad002).
- Adriaans, Jule, Carsten Sauer, und Katharina Wrohlich. 2025. „The Gender Gap in Fair Earnings Increases with Age Due to Higher Age Premium for Men“. *The British Journal of Sociology* 76(1):180–87. doi:[10.1111/1468-4446.13149](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13149).

Working Package 4: Justice Evaluations and political attitudes

- Kalleitner, Fabian, und Licia Bobzien. 2024. „Taxed Fairly? How Differences in Perception Shape Attitudes towards Progressive Taxation“. *European Sociological Review* 40(3):535–48. doi:[10.1093/esr/jcad060](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcad060).
- Kalleitner, Fabian, Lukas Schlogl, und Licia Bobzien. 2024. „How Much for Whom? Explaining Preferences for Welfare Benefits to Short-Time Workers and the Unemployed“. *Journal of European Social Policy*. doi:[10.1177/09589287241283707](https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287241283707).

Working Package 5: Dissemination

- Adriaans, J., & Liebig, S. (2021). Einkommensgerechtigkeit in Deutschland und Europa. In Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), & Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung (BiB) (Eds.), *Datenreport 2021. Ein Sozialbericht für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (pp. 278-285). Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb).
- https://www.wzb.eu/system/files/docs/sv/k/kap_08_dr2021.pdf
- Liebig, S., Adriaans, J., & Bohmann, S. (2022). EuropäerInnen nehmen Defizite in der sozialen Gerechtigkeit wahr: Editorial. DIW Wochenbericht. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_WB:2022-7-1
- Liebig, S., & Wittenberg, E. (2022). Soziale Gerechtigkeit ist die Voraussetzung für das Vertrauen in die Demokratie: Interview. DIW Wochenbericht. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_WB:2022-7-4
- Moya, C., & Adriaans, J. (2022a). Gerechtigkeitsprofile in Europa: Große Unterschiede bei der Bewertung von Ungleichheit. DIW Wochenbericht. https://doi.org/10.18723/DIW_WB:2022-7-5