

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Topline results from Round 9 of
the European Social Survey

ESS Topline
Results Series

Issue
10

Justice and Fairness in Europe: Topline results from Round 9 of the European Social Survey

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Message from the Director

Welcome to the tenth issue in our Topline Results Series: Justice and Fairness in Europe. This publication includes analysis of the Justice and Fairness module included in Round 9 of the European Social Survey (ESS), fielded amongst respondents in late 2018 and early 2019.

In each round of the ESS, we invite applications of questions on a single theme to be proposed for inclusion. The Justice and Fairness module was proposed by a team of academics led by Stefan Liebig (Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)) in May 2016 and selected for inclusion the following July.

The questionnaire design team (QDT) who proposed the module then worked closely with members of the ESS Core Scientific Team (CST) to design the final set of questions.

It is a long and detailed process to ensure that the questions are easily understandable for respondents, and that the highest possible quality data is collected. This publication is the culmination of several years of planning and hard work by the QDT and the ESS CST.

We therefore extend our gratitude to the QDT for proposing this module, and working with members of our CST who helped contribute to its development,

specifically Eric Harrison, Brita Dorer, Salima Douhou, Diana Zavala Rojas and Luca Salini.

The module - Justice and Fairness in Europe: Coping with Growing Inequalities and Heterogeneities - aimed to understand attitudes towards significant increases in social inequalities over the last few decades.

Specifically, it sought to measure public attitudes on economic and educational inequalities, political and societal institutions, fairness of the distribution of resources, attitudes toward normative principles, social closure and beliefs in a just world.

Our Round 9 dataset includes responses collected in 27 countries and marks another steady increase in the number of participating countries. Further countries will be added in due course. We are doing everything we can to entice more countries to take part in the ESS, and this latest dataset shows the quality of data that funding agencies in participating countries can expect to receive.

We hope that you enjoy this short summary of key findings from the module and that you subsequently download the data from the module for further investigation.

Rory Fitzgerald
ESS ERIC Director
City, University of London

Introduction

Over the past few decades, European societies have witnessed unprecedented increases in inequalities in wealth and income. Faced with more flexible labour markets, skill-based technological change, ongoing demographic change and migration, European welfare models have been unable to effectively address these rising inequalities. Accordingly, inequalities in wealth, income, education and other social resources and their consequences for solidarity, social cohesion, and democracy more generally have attracted much attention, both in academic and public debate.

While some argue that increasing inequalities are always harmful and serve as proof of growing injustices in society, others see a certain degree of inequality as a necessary component of a market economy. They argue that differences in individual talents, investments made in one's own education, or even motivation must be rewarded. Whether inequalities are large or small, good or bad, just or unjust, always seems to depend on the normative perspective from which they are illuminated. Empirical justice research shows that people differ in their preference for certain distributions

and distribution rules and thus ultimately also in their perception and evaluation of existing inequalities.

The ESS Round 9 module - Justice and Fairness in Europe: Coping with Growing Inequalities and Heterogeneities - emphasizes these issues and allows for the in-depth study of justice perceptions across Europe. The module, which was fielded in 2018/2019, sheds light on perceptions of justice for self and others regarding different outcomes such as income, education and job chances. Drawing on this rich pool of information, this report focuses on the normative views people hold on the principles that should guide the fair allocation of goods and burdens within a society, the fairness of incomes for self and for others, the fairness of life chances, and the fairness of related political procedures.

This report was created as part of the collaborative research project "Perceptions of Inequalities and Justice in Europe" located at the German Institute for Economic Research DIW Berlin and funded by the Leibniz Association. We thank Katrin Auspurg, Fabian Kalleitner, Philipp Lersch, Martón Medgyesi, Cristóbal Moya, Simone Schneider, and Stefan Traub for valuable comments on earlier versions of this report.

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Wide agreement with distributive norms of equity and need across Europe

What determines whether inequalities are considered fair or unfair? One factor is whether these distributional results run counter to, or coincide with, the normative ideas of how goods and burdens should be allocated within a society. Four basic distributive principles are identified in empirical justice research. Equality: everyone should be given an equal share of goods and burdens. Need: goods and burdens should be allocated in a way that ensures basic needs are covered. Equity: the distribution of goods and burdens should be based upon individual inputs, that is the more someone contributes, the more that someone should receive. Finally, goods and burdens are distributed according to the principle of entitlement based on status, where both origins and past achievements play a role (Hülle, Liebig, and May 2018¹). Respondents were presented with propositions relating to each of these normative justice principles as basis for a fair society, and were invited to state whether they agreed or disagreed with them.

Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of respondents who stated they agree, disagree, or

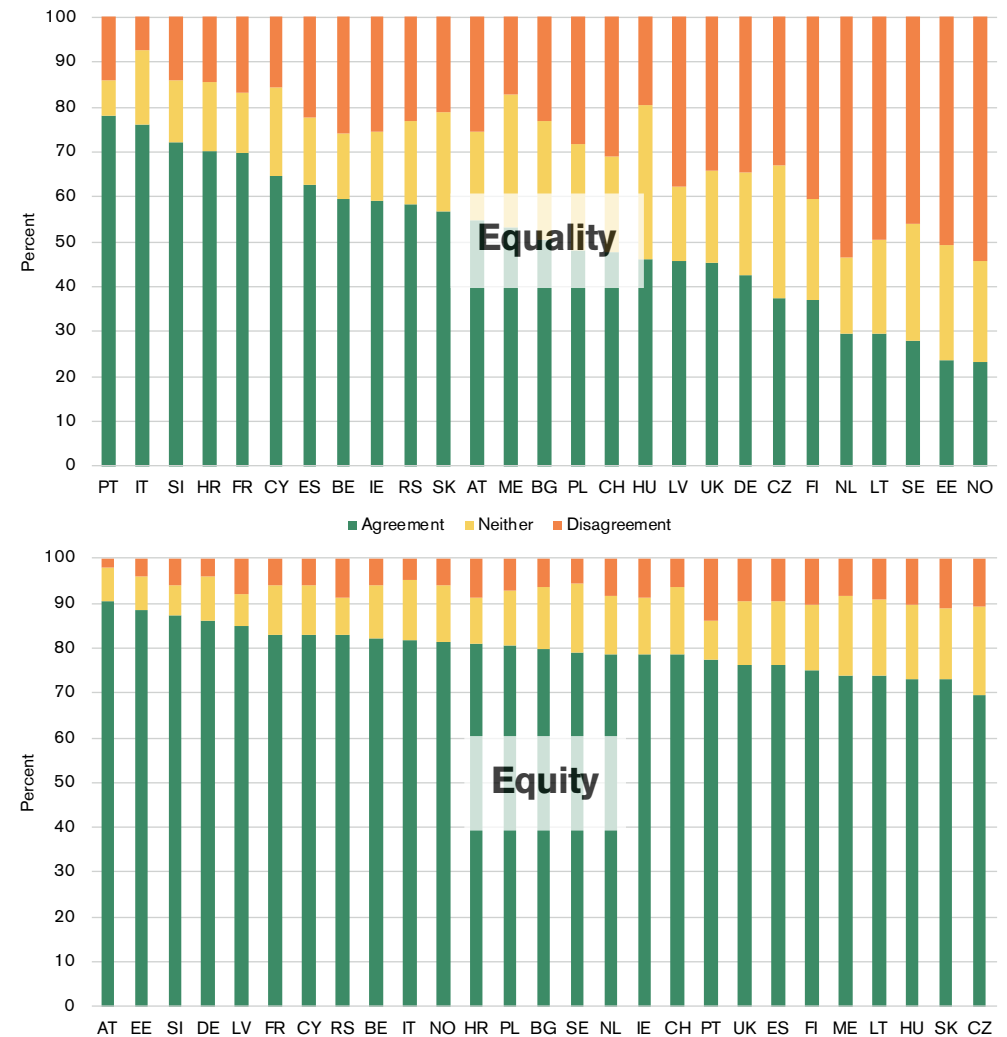
neither agree nor disagree with the justice principle in question.

Figure 1 shows that support for the equality principles varies substantially across European societies. While only 23% of respondents in Norway said they agree that a society is fair when income and wealth are distributed equally, a majority of 78% of respondents in Portugal expressed their support. There is a 'simple majority' (more than 50%) support of the equality principle in 13 out of 27 countries.

However, there are only two countries (the Netherlands and Norway), where a majority of respondents explicitly disagrees with the equality principle. Contrary to the equality principle, agreement with the equity principle is almost unanimous across Europe. The share of respondents who agree that a society is fair when hard-working people earn more than others ranges between almost 70% in the Czech Republic and over 90% in Austria with the percentage of those who disagree with the statement ranging between only 2% in Austria and 14% in Portugal.

Europeans seem to agree that rewarding individual inputs is an important principle guiding the allocation of goods and burdens in a fair society.

Figure 1. Agreement and disagreement with the justice principles equality and equity in Europe



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: "A society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed among all people." (Equality) "A society is fair when hard-working people earn more than others." (Equity); 1 "Agree strongly" 2 "Agree" 3 "Neither agree nor disagree" 4 "Disagree" 5 "Disagree strongly".

1. Hülle, S., Liebig, S., May, M. (2018). Measuring Attitudes Toward Distributive Justice: The Basic Social Justice Orientations Scale. Social Indicators Research 136(2), 663–692.

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Wide agreement with distributive norms of equity and need across Europe

But while individual contributions should be recognized, a majority of Europeans also agrees that a society is fair when it takes care of those who are poor and in need regardless of what they give back to society, underlining the importance of the justice principle of need. The Czech Republic is the only country studied where less than 50% of respondents agree with the need principle.

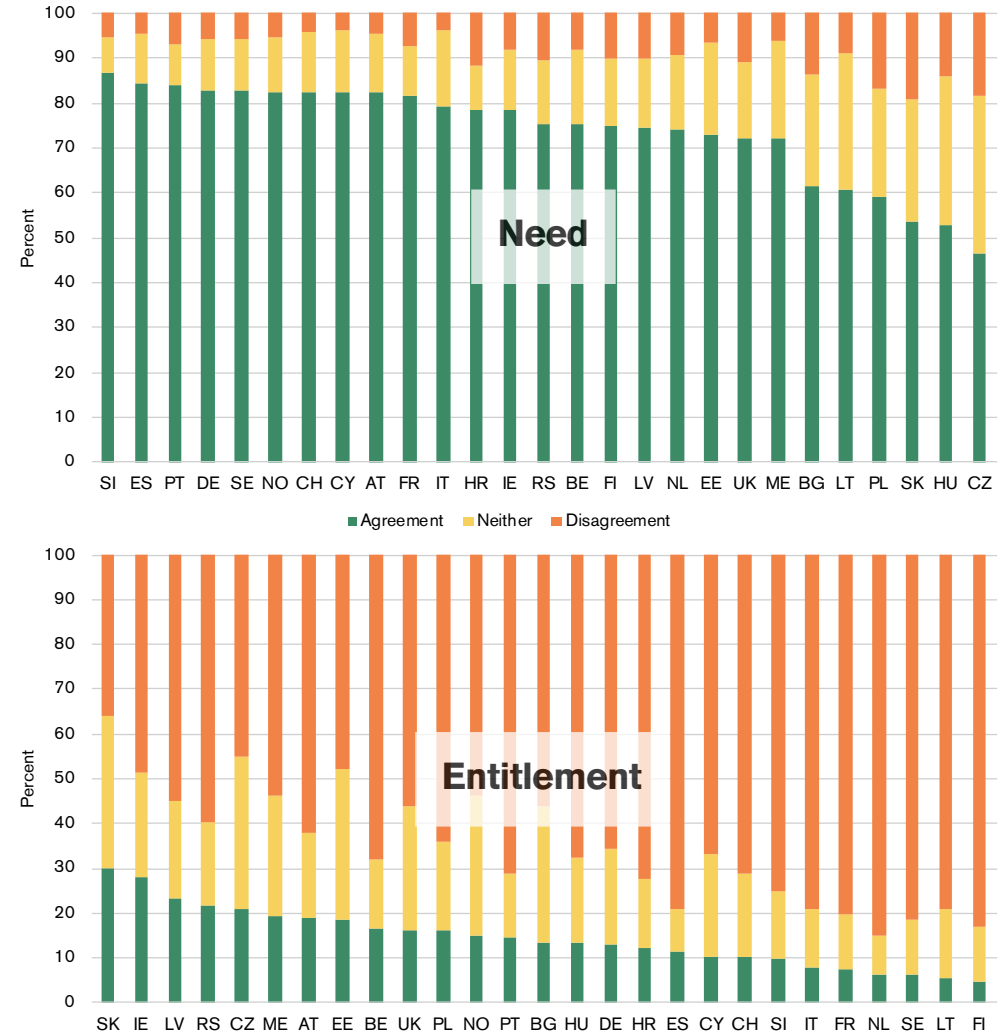
The countries which show the lowest rates of agreement with the need principle are not necessarily in disagreement but are more often indifferent towards the idea of allocating resources based on individual needs regardless of individual inputs.

The fourth and final normative justice principle entitlement is met with scepticism in Europe. In 23 out of 27 countries a majority of respondents disagree with the entitlement principle. The highest share of agreement with the statement that a society is fair when people from families with high social status enjoy privileges in their lives is found in Slovakia (30%).

Overall, asking for the agreement and disagreement with the four basic distributive principles equality, equity, need, and entitlement reveals both similarities and differences across European societies. While Europeans seem to agree that taking individual inputs as well as needs into account is important for a fair society, distributing goods and burdens within a society based on status receives little support. Equality as a guiding principle for the just allocation of resources is met with support in some countries, but is seen more critically in others.

“The countries which show the lowest rates of agreement with the need principle are not necessarily in disagreement but are more often indifferent towards the idea of allocating resources based on individual needs regardless of individual inputs.”

Figure 2. Agreement and disagreement with the justice principles need and entitlement in Europe



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: "A society is fair when it takes care of those who are poor and in need regardless of what they give back to society." (Need) "A society is fair when people from families with social status enjoy privileges in their lives." (Entitlement); 1 "Agree strongly" 2 "Agree" 3 "Neither agree nor disagree" 4 "Disagree" 5 "Disagree strongly".

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Very low incomes are evaluated as unfair across Europe with stronger perceptions of injustice in high inequality settings

Agreement or disagreement with the distributive principles of equality, equity, need, and entitlement is directly related to how existing inequalities are evaluated. Given the wide approval of equity and need in Europe, inequalities that violate either of these principles will likely be perceived as unjust. The divide between high and low incomes is often referenced, when discussing how a just income distribution can incorporate competing normative justice principles that receive wide public support.

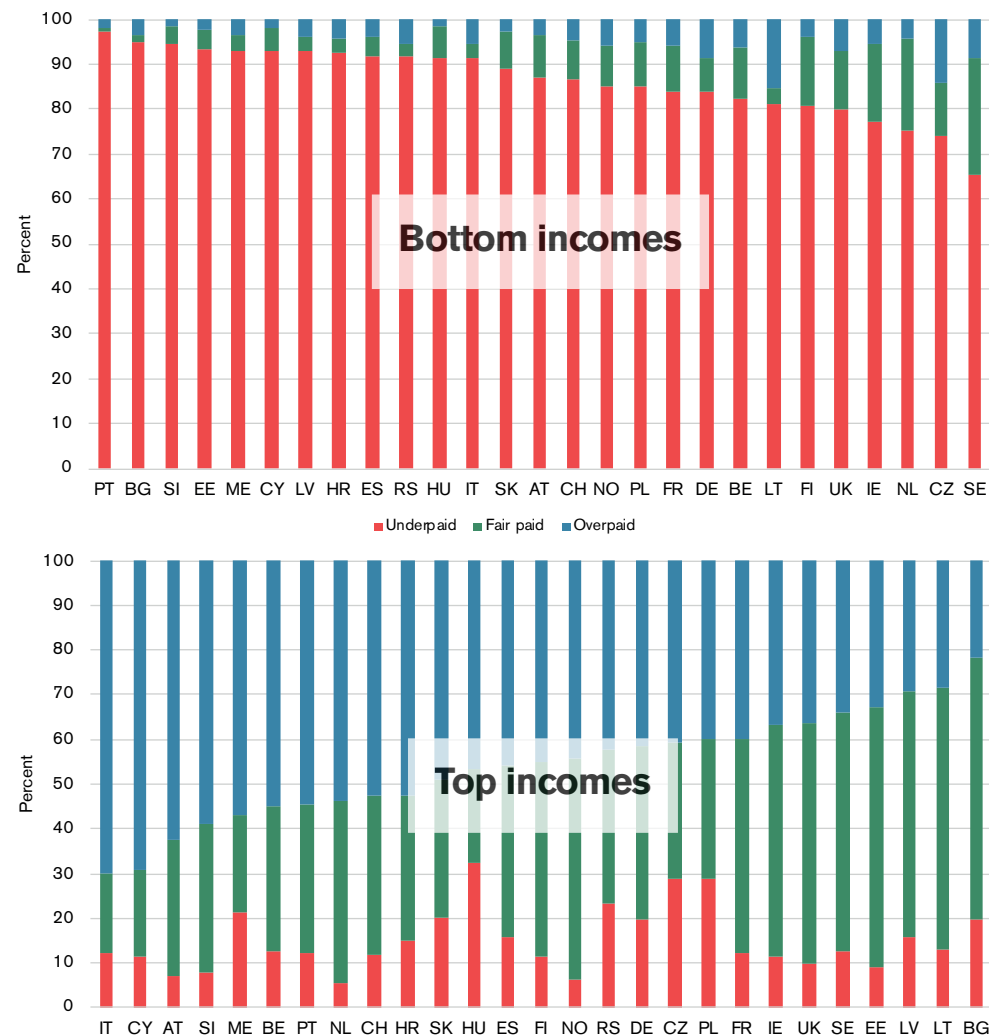
Drawing on these debates, all respondents of ESS Round 9 have been asked to evaluate information on pre-tax incomes that the poorest and richest 10% of full-time workers earn in their respective countries. The country-specific income levels shown to respondents were calculated by the national teams of the ESS and are based on external data sources.² Individuals could state if in their opinion, the richest and poorest workers in their country are fairly paid, unfairly overpaid or unfairly underpaid, to map how citizens judge the actual level of inequality in their country.

Figure 3 plots the country-specific evaluations for bottom and top incomes indicating the share of respondents within a country who evaluate top and bottom incomes as underpaid (red), fairly (green), or overpaid (blue).

Figure 3 suggests two main insights: (1) bottom incomes are judged as unfairly low by the great majority of respondents in the ESS; (2) top incomes are more likely to be perceived as fair compared to incomes at the bottom of the distribution.

These results are in line with the observed support for both the need and equity principle across Europe. Very low incomes for full-time workers may violate the justice norms of equity and need, while incomes at the top of the distribution may be perceived as fair if they are in keeping with the general notion that higher contributions warrant higher rewards. Nonetheless, a sizeable share of respondents in Europe evaluate the top income earners in their country as overpaid signaling that these rewards are seen as undeserved.

Figure 3. Justice evaluation of bottom and top incomes



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: "Please think about the bottom 10% (top 10%) of employees working full-time in [country], earning less (more) than [amount]. In your opinion, are these incomes unfairly low, fair, or unfairly high?"; -4/-1 "Unfairly low pay"; 0 "Fair pay"; +1/+4 "Unfairly high pay".

2. National teams were instructed to use EU-SILC data if possible or a data source that is of comparable data quality.

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Very low incomes are evaluated as unfair across Europe with stronger perceptions of injustice in high inequality settings

In Figure 4 we study the relationship between the actual level of inequality and fairness judgments for bottom and top incomes. Inequality is measured as the ratio of top incomes to bottom incomes - here referred to as the 90/10 ratio³ and represents the quantitative distance between rich and poor workers in a country. The higher the 90/10 ratio, the greater the divide between low- and high-income employees and the greater the inequality in a country. The level of inequality is plotted by the average justice evaluation of bottom and top incomes in each country.

The justice evaluation ranges between -4 (unfairly too low) and +4 (unfairly too high) and it is centered around 0 (fair income); positive values are associated with unfair overpayment perceptions, negative values with unfair underpayment. As for the lowest earners, we observe a strong negative relationship between the level of inequality in a country and the justice evaluation, meaning that we find stronger perceptions of unjust underpayment (represented by negative values) with respect to the lowest incomes in countries with high inequality.

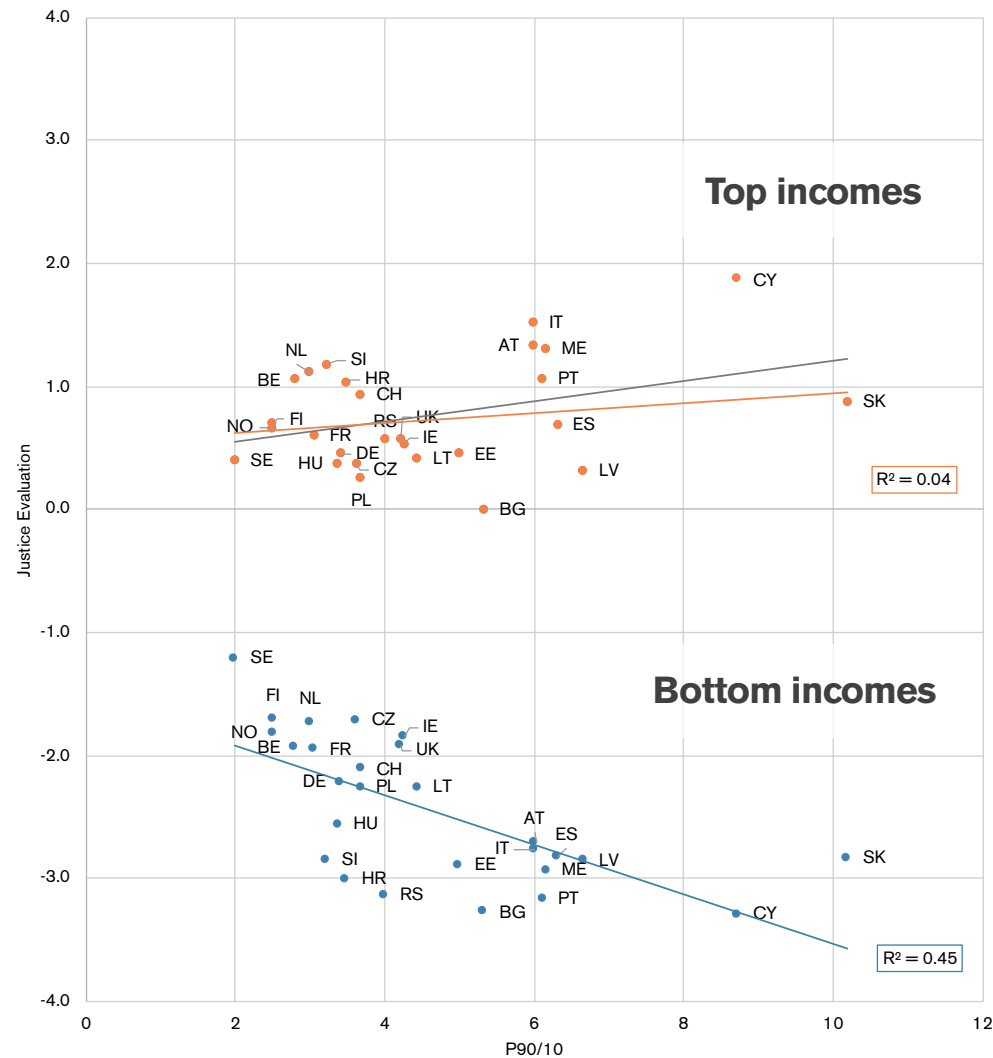
3. The 90/10 ratio is one of the most popular inequality indexes and quantifies the distance between the richest and the poorest in a distribution. If we rank all the individuals in a country over 100 categories from the poorest (1st) to the richest (100th), the 90/10 ratio is calculated as the income level eligible to be in the 90th category (relatively rich workers) divided by the income level eligible to be in the 10th category (relatively poor workers).

As for the highest earners, there is a weak positive correlation between the actual level of inequality and justice evaluations. This relationship, however, is not very pronounced and sensitive to outliers: if Cyprus is excluded the correlation is close to zero as shown by the orange line and becomes insignificant.⁴ While countries in the bottom panel are scattered quite closely around the line that illustrates the relationship between evaluations of bottom incomes and inequality, countries in the top panel do not arrange as closely around the line illustrating the relationship between evaluations of top incomes and inequality.

Actual inequality therefore seems to play a role in exacerbating unfairness perception only in the fairness evaluation of bottom incomes and does not play a prominent role in the justice evaluation at the top of the income distribution. These results corroborate and reinforce our previous descriptive findings: inequality at the bottom of the distribution seems to elicit stronger feelings of injustice compared to inequality at the top of the distribution.

4. Cyprus seems to drive the observed positive correlation between actual inequality and the evaluation of top incomes. Considering the overall country pattern we conclude that there is no robust evidence for a positive link between the level of inequality and justice evaluations of top incomes.

Figure 4. Justice evaluation of top and bottom incomes by level of actual inequality



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied.

Justice and Fairness in Europe

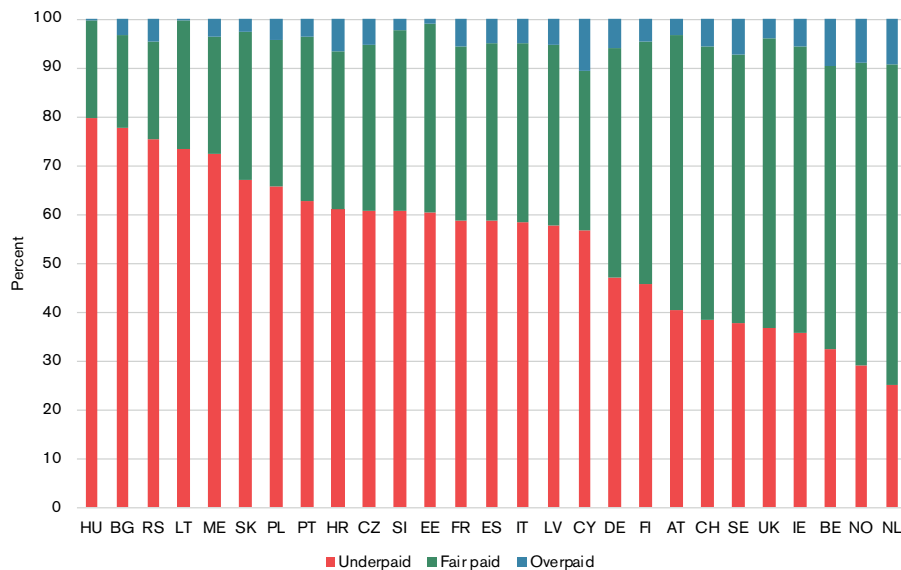
Inequality in the justice perceptions of own earnings: Higher shares of unfairly paid respondents in Eastern and Southern Europe

The picture on European attitudes to justice of incomes is complemented by asking respondents to judge their own income situation. Respondents who receive income from work were asked to evaluate their gross pay.⁵ Figure 5 displays for each country the share of active workers that consider their own gross earnings from labour as unfairly

5. Gross pay refers to the amount of income earned before any deductions, while net pay refers to the amount received after taxes and mandatory deductions.

too low (red bars), fair (green bars) and unfairly too high (blue bars). There exists great heterogeneity in fairness perception between European countries: Eastern European countries are typically characterized by the highest share of respondents who perceive themselves as underpaid, reaching shares of up to 80% in Hungary. Southern Europe countries follow, while central and north European countries exhibit the highest shares of respondents who consider themselves fairly paid with up to 65% of respondents reporting this in the Netherlands.

Figure 5. Justice evaluation of own gross income from work in Europe



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), active working population, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: "Would you say your gross pay is unfairly low, fair, or unfairly high?"; -1/-1 "Unfairly low pay", 0 "Fair pay", +1/+4 "Unfairly high pay".

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Overall positive evaluations of own educational chances, while own job chances are evaluated as less fair

Countries across Europe differ in their perception of the justice of incomes both for self and others. While such concerns for the justice of outcomes are important and have been shown to result in a number of far reaching consequences, research also shows that outcomes are better accepted when they are the result of just procedures (Vermunt and Steensma 2016⁶). Following this idea, respondents of the ESS were asked to rate to what extent they themselves had a fair chance to achieve the level of education they aspired to and if they have a fair chance to get the jobs they are seeking. Respondents used a response scale that ranged from 0 "Does not apply at all" to 10 "Applies completely"; country averages are shown Figure 6.

Overall, evaluations of own educational chances paint a rather positive picture. In all countries, current job chances are evaluated as less fair with country averages ranging between 4.22 in Montenegro to 7.01 in Sweden.

In line with the geographical divide in the justice of income, the fairness of one's own chances on the labour market show the lowest values in

Eastern and Southern European countries and the highest values in Northern and Central European countries. No clear regional geographical pattern emerges for the fairness of own educational chances.

Outcomes are evaluated more positively if they are the result of just procedures. Following this line of reasoning, the perception to have a fair chance in obtaining education and jobs should be associated with more positive evaluations of one's own income - as the latter is affected by both education and success on the labor market. Using country averages to investigate how the evaluations of chances and outcomes are related, the suspected pattern emerges (see Figure 7). In countries, where own educational and job chances are evaluated more positively, respondents' own gross incomes are evaluated as fairer on average.

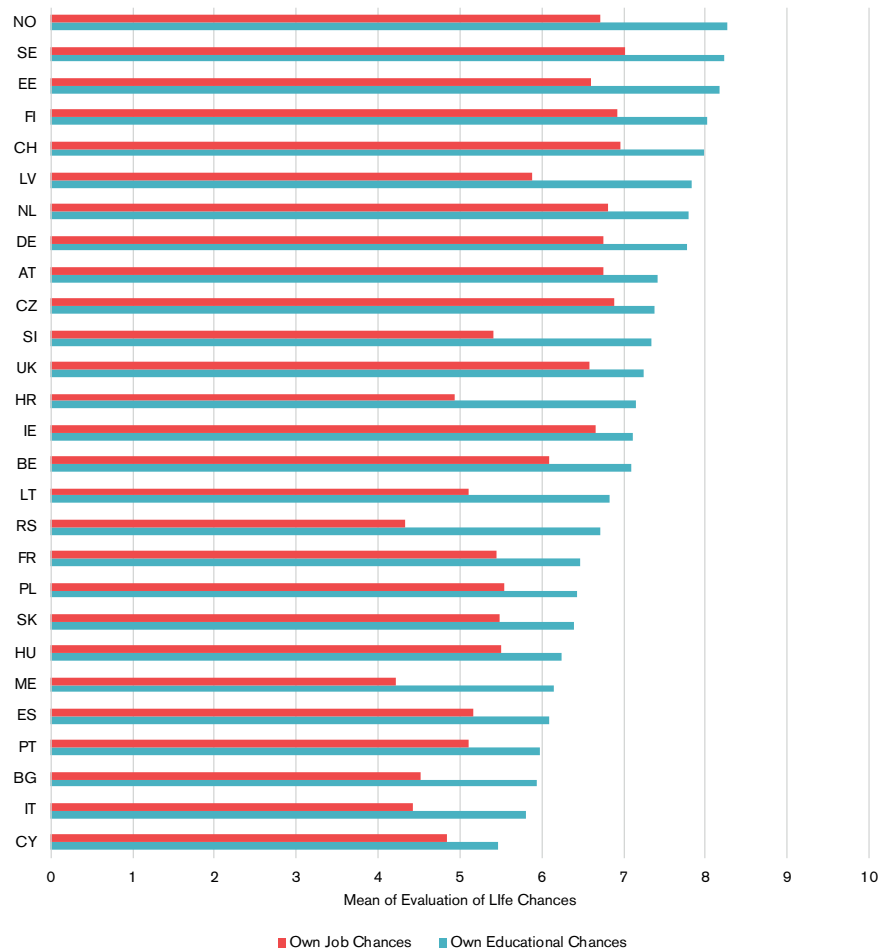
“In line with the geographical divide in the justice of income, the fairness of own chances on the labour market show the lowest values in Eastern and Southern European countries and the highest values in Northern and Central European countries.”

6. Vermunt, R., & Steensma, H. (2016). Procedural justice. In C. Sabbagh & M. Schmitt (eds.), *Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research* (pp. 219–236). New York: Springer.

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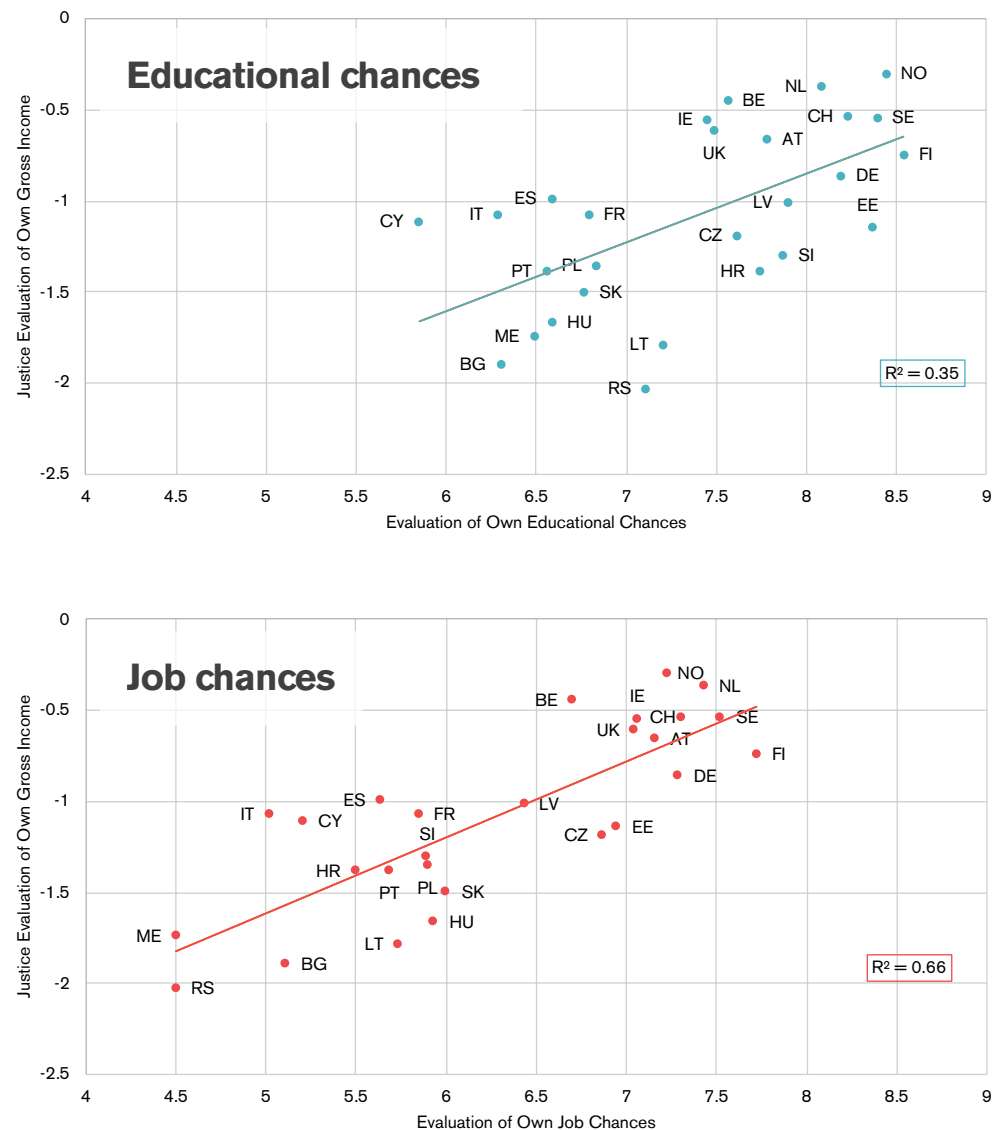
Overall positive evaluations of own educational chances, while own job chances are evaluated as less fair

Figure 6. Justice evaluation of own life chances



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: "Compared to other people in [country], I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I was seeking" "Compared to other people in [country], I would have a fair chance of getting the job I was seeking"; 0 "Does not apply at all" – 10 "Applies completely".

Figure 7. Justice evaluation of own gross income by evaluation of own educational chances and job chances



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), active working population, post-stratification weights applied.

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Low to medium political procedural justice ratings show a north-south gradient

There is a strong association between the perceived fairness of educational and job chances and the justice evaluation of one's own income. While education and job chances are directly related to income, political decisions influence more generally how benefits and burdens, resources and chances, are allocated within a society and the acceptance of such decisions is not only relevant for the perception of economic fairness but is key for any democratic society.

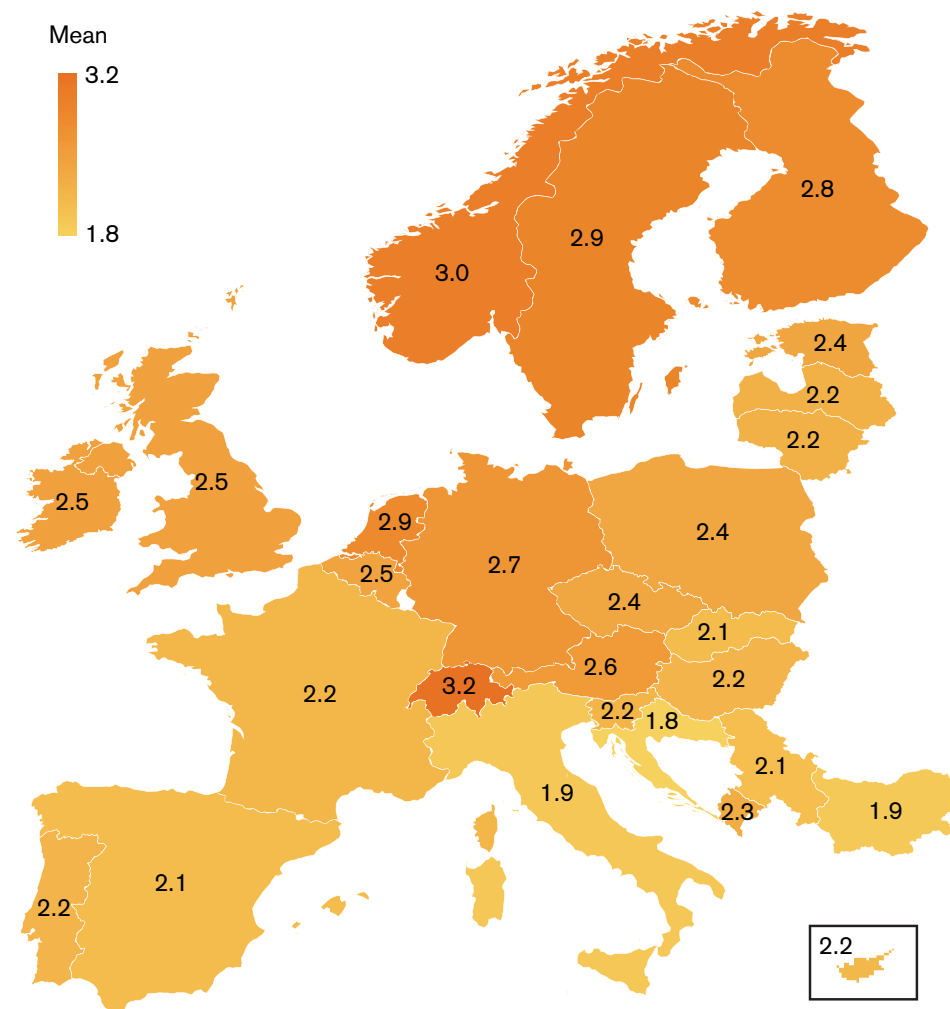
To capture if political decision making is perceived as fair, we asked respondents to evaluate the extent to which the political system in their respective countries ensures a fair chance of participation, impartiality, transparency, and allows everyone to have a voice in political decision-making processes. Averaging responses across these evaluations results in a measure that ranges from 1 indicating minimal political procedural justice and 5 indicating maximum political procedural justice.

Figure 8 maps the average country scores for perceived political procedural justice across Europe, with increasing levels of perceived fairness traveling from lighter to darker colors.

Empirically, country averages range between 1.8 and 3.2, indicating "very little" and "some" political procedural justice respectively - painting a rather bleak assessment of the fairness of political procedures in Europe. Moreover, there seems to be a north-south gradient. The highest scores are found in Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden, while the lowest political procedural justice is found in Croatia, Bulgaria, and Italy. Again, perceptions of injustice are stronger in Eastern and Mediterranean countries.

“The highest scores are found in Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden, while the lowest political procedural justice is found in Croatia, Bulgaria, and Italy.”

Figure 8. European map of political procedural justice



Data: ESS Round 9 (Release 2.0), full sample, post-stratification weights applied. Measure: Mean index of fair participation, impartiality, transparency, and voice in political decision making. Higher values and dark orange color indicate high political procedural justice and lower values and yellow color indicate lower political procedural justice. The scale ranged from 1 (minimal political procedural justice) to 5 (maximum political procedural justice).

Justice and Fairness in Europe

Conclusion

Creating a European map of justice attitudes based on the ESS Round 9 module “Justice and Fairness in Europe” reveals a number of interesting insights. There is strong consensus among the studied European societies that both equity and need are important guiding principles for allocating goods and burdens in a fair society. Specifically, there is widespread support for both rewarding individual contributions as well as taking care of those in need. However, countries differ in their aggregate preference for the equality principle which suggests that a society is considered fair when income and wealth are distributed equally among its members. Taken together, the observed attitudes towards the normative justice principles suggest that simplified conclusions about inequality as “good” or “bad” do not resonate with Europeans.

Studying how Europeans evaluate incomes at the bottom and at the top of their respective national income distributions shows that: very low incomes are seen as unfairly too low by an overwhelming majority, while top incomes are less often identified as unfairly too high, suggesting that Europeans identify a more severe justice deficit at the bottom of the income distribution. This justice deficit is stronger in countries with higher levels of actual inequality. When asked specifically about their own income from work, the European map of justice attitudes shows a geographical divide. While a majority of respondents in Northern European countries considers their own gross pay to be fair, the

opposite is true for Mediterranean and Eastern European countries. Europeans differ in their experience of injustice with regard to income for themselves and others, but how do they evaluate the fairness of procedures that shape the distribution of rewards within society? Studying the perceived fairness of personal education and job chances, we find that respondents evaluate their own educational chances rather positively. Compared to educational chances, job chances are perceived as somewhat less fair in all countries in this study. Concluding with the perception of political procedural justice, we again find that, injustice perceptions are more pronounced in Eastern and Mediterranean countries.

In conclusion, respondents of the ESS strongly support the notion that both rewarding individual inputs and taking care of those in need form the basis for a fair society, suggesting that inequality is not seen as generally unfair by the general public in most of Europe, but that Europeans generally favour striking a balance between rewarding effort and caring for those with the least means. At the same time, Europeans perceive injustices with regard to their own income, the income of others, and political procedures. But these perceptions of injustice are not equally distributed across Europe. Eastern and Southern European countries show more severe perceptions of injustice, exposing them to the negative individual and societal consequences of experienced injustices.

ESS data and documentation

Find out more about the European Social Survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) has undertaken 428,437 face-to-face interviews since Round 1 was fielded in 2002/03. All the documentation and data - collected over the subsequent waves up to and including Round 9 (2018/19) - is available to download or view online (europeansocialsurvey.org).

The ESS became a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) in 2013, meaning all participants contribute to the budget of the project. During Round 9, there were 27 participating countries who deposited data, including 23 ERIC Members. At the time of writing, this is the highest number of members of any ERIC.

By using the tools detailed below - EduNet and NESSTAR - you can join over 160,000 people who have already registered to access ESS data.

Analysis of our data was used in 4,417 academic journal articles, books and chapters, working and conference papers published between 2003-18.

EduNet

The ESS e-learning tool, EduNet, provides hands-on examples and exercises to guide users through the research process, from a theoretical problem to the interpretation of statistical results.

NESSTAR

The ESS Online Analysis package uses NESSTAR - an online data analysis tool. Documentation to support NESSTAR is available from NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (nesstar.com).

Topline Results Series

This is the tenth issue in our Topline Results series of publications, available to download from the ESS website. Other issues in the series include:

1. Trust in Justice (also available in Croatian and Finnish)
2. Welfare Attitudes in Europe (also available in Croatian, Cypriot Greek, Turkish and Ukrainian)
3. Economic Crisis, Quality of Work and Social Integration (also available in Serbian)
4. Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy (also available in Albanian, Bulgarian, German, Italian, Lithuanian and Slovak)
5. Europeans' Personal and Social Wellbeing (also available in Albanian, French, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak, Slovene and Swedish)
6. Social Inequalities in Health and their Determinants (also available in Danish, French, German, Irish Gaelic, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovene and Spanish)
7. Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents (also available in Finnish, French, Georgian, German, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Slovene and Spanish)
8. The Past, Present and Future of European Welfare Attitudes (also available in Bulgarian, French, German, Lithuanian and Spanish)
9. European Attitudes towards Climate Change and Energy (also available in French, German, Slovak and Spanish)

About the ESS

ESS is an academically-driven survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2002. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of diverse populations in more than thirty nations.

Undertaken every two years with newly selected, cross-sectional samples, the full dataset contains the results of over 425,000 completed interviews.

The European Social Survey has been a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) since 2013.

ESS topics:

- Trust in institutions
- Political engagement
- Socio-political values
- Moral and social values
- Social capital
- Social exclusion
- National, ethnic and religious identity
- Health and wellbeing
- Demographic composition
- Education and occupation
- Financial circumstances
- Household circumstances
- Attitudes to welfare
- Trust in criminal justice
- Expressions and experiences of ageism
- Citizenship, involvement and democracy
- Immigration
- Family, work and wellbeing
- Economic morality, justice and fairness
- The organisation of the life-course
- Climate change and energy
- Human values scale

27 countries participated in Round 9 of the ESS, fielded in 2018/19.

Members: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. **Observer:** Switzerland. **Other Participants:** Montenegro, Serbia and Spain.

Multi-national advisory groups to the ESS ERIC General Assembly are the Methods Advisory Board (MAB), Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and Finance Committee (FINCOM). The ESS ERIC Headquarters are located at City, University of London.

The ESS ERIC Core Scientific Team includes: GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Germany); Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium); NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Norway); SCP - The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Netherlands); Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain); University of Essex (UK); and University of Ljubljana (Slovenia).

The National Coordinators' (NC) Forum involves national teams from all participating countries.

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