ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

The research fellow will support the activities of the Department of Economics-UNIBO Unit of the European Cohort Development Project (ECDP).

ECDP is a 18 months project – starting in January 2018- financed by the European Commission’s within the INFRADEV research programme ‘Horizon2020’, involving a consortium of leading researchers and policy makers across Europe. The aim of the European Cohort Development Project (ECDP) is to create a specification and business case for a European Research Infrastructure that will provide, over the next 25 years, comparative longitudinal survey data on children and young people’s well-being. The infrastructure developed by ECDP will subsequently coordinate the first Europe wide cohort survey, named EuroCohort.

Children’s well-being is fundamental to society as a whole. Promoting children's well-being is not only vital in order for children to have a good childhood, but also as a firm basis for their future well-being as adults. How children experience critical points of development affects their quality of life, their productivity, welfare dependency and the transmission of their later life outcomes to their own children. A failure to ensure high level of well-being for children carries costs because lower well-being is correlated with poor social and economic outcomes and mental health. Currently there is no readily available robust data to assess the child well-being situation across Europe or in comparison to the rest of the world. Existing data, which have their own limitations, indicate that European nations vary widely in terms of child well-being but there is no comparative data showing the circumstances of how children develop into adults.

A comparative longitudinal survey of child well-being in Europe offers policy-makers at a European and Member State level a number of new possibilities for policy formulation. Longitudinal well-being surveys can help us understand transitions in children and young peoples' lives (for instance the step from education to the labour market), shocks and traumas (breaking up of the family unit) as well as turning points that might contribute to the understanding of well-being. These transitions are inherently longitudinal processes and so longitudinal data are necessary to analyse and understand such life course developments. Only this type of data is able to inform policies aimed to improve child well-being over time and answer questions about the impact of policy interventions on children and young people’s outcomes.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The Department of Economics-UNIBO Unit of ECDP will mainly contribute to the Work Package 3 of the ECDP project, titled “Business case: costs, cost-benefit analysis and case studies”. This work package provides information that allows EuroCohort to be fully costed and subsequently uses these data to inform a cost-benefit analysis which will contribute to making the business case to policy makers and national funding bodies. To support the business case a series of case studies will be developed to show the importance of collecting longitudinal survey data in the policy making process.
In particular, **the winning candidate for this position will collaborate**, under the supervision of Prof. Giulio Ecchia, in the development of an Ex ante Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) that draws on recent thinking about Well-being Analysis. The CBA will involve the following stages.

1. Define the scope of the analysis: a societal perspective will be taken, looking beyond the costs and benefits that accrue to Member State governments and include costs and benefits to the end users of policy. The analysis will also include all 28 Member States. Key issues to decide at this stage include the perspective to take in the analysis (for example will the perspective be that of the state, the criminal justice system or the whole of society), what outcomes are to be measured and the alternatives to be compared (for example, participation in a programme versus non-participation).

2. Assemble cost data: this will include costs incurred by co-operating agencies and might also include costs incurred by research participants. Costs will be estimated drawing on established, large-scale surveys. An interview programme with senior managers of surveys including the ESS, EUSILC, SHARE, GGP the Millenium Cohort Study in the UK and Young Lives will be undertaken to collect estimates taking account of fixed and variable costs.

3. Estimate impact of project: drawing on earlier research Nutley et al. (2003) distinguish four types of research utilization:
   - **Instrumental use**: Where research feeds directly into policy or practice decisions leading to changes in behaviour and practice. In relation to EuroCohort this would be where survey findings lead directly to changes in policy at a European or Member State level.
   - **Conceptual use**: where research findings change understanding of a situation and provide new ways of thinking, bringing about changes in levels of knowledge, understanding and attitudes. In relation to EuroCohort this would be where survey findings change the policy narrative, but do not lead directly to policy changes.
   - **Persuasive utilisation**: research is an instrument of persuasion and either findings, or the act of research, are used as a political tool to legitimate particular courses of action or inaction.
   - **Wider influence**: where research has an influence beyond the institutions and events being studied, perhaps because evidence is synthesized or gains currency through networks of practitioners and researchers.

4. Estimates of impact will concentrate on modelling instrumental and conceptual use. For instrumental use a first order impact would be that survey findings bring about changes in policies at a European or Member State level. These changes might lead to changes in investment in public social expenditure that affect children and young people’s well-being and will estimate these costs and benefits. But taking a wider societal perspective we might also see second order impacts where those policy changes affect a change in children and young people’s well-being. We will also attempt to model these impacts. For conceptual use these first and second order impacts will be more difficult to specify and hence estimate. Assumptions to populate the model will be drawn from existing studies of the impact of evidence on policy-making and existing studies of the impact of policy changes on well-being. We will undertake a Rapid Evidence Assessment to ensure that all relevant studies are considered and that we avoid bias. Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) are appraisals of existing evidence that follow a similar process to a Systematic Review and involve collating descriptive outlines of the available evidence on a topic, critically appraising the studies identified, sifting out studies of poor quality, and providing an overview of what that evidence tells us and what is missing from it. The Rapid Evidence Assessment will be supplemented by a series of workshops with policy-makers in four of Member States with contrasting demographic structures where the assumptions derived from the literature will be validated. Throughout the process the possibility of unintended outcomes, which might be positive or negative, will be considered.

5. Estimate the monetary value of outcomes: the defining feature of a CBA is that the effects of the intervention – in this case a better understanding of well-being – are valued in standardized monetary units so that the benefit of the intervention, expressed in monetary terms can be compared directly with the costs of the intervention, also expressed in monetary terms. Different methodologies for estimating the value of changes in well-being will be explored. Whichever methodology is used, because this is an ex ante evaluation estimates from the existing literature, will be used to generate assumptions.
6. Calculate present value and assess efficiency: If the monetary expressions of the costs and benefits of an intervention are to be compared directly then it is important we recognise not all of these costs and benefits accrue at the same point in time. Therefore, a process of discounting will be used to calculate the Net Present Value of all costs. Once the Net Present Value of costs and benefits has been calculated then the intervention’s efficiency can be calculated in the form of a benefit-cost ratio (benefits divided by costs) or net value (benefits minus costs).

7. Describe the distribution of costs and benefits: describing the distribution of programme costs and benefits involves identifying who gained and lost from the intervention. This will include an analysis of efficiency from the perspective of the state and from the perspective of wider society.

8. Conduct sensitivity analysis to understand how sensitive the estimate of costs and benefits is to specific assumptions in the model.