

## A European eco-social investment constituency? Unpacking public opinion towards EU green, social investment and social protection policies in 15 countries

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, green policies to reduce pollution and mitigate the consequences of climate change have taken pride of place in the European Union's (EU) agenda. At the European Council of 12 December 2019, all member states endorsed the European Green Deal (EGD), a major socio-economic restructuring plan to confront climate change, which enshrines the commitment to achieve climate neutrality (zero net emissions of greenhouse gases) by 2050 and mobilise public investment to promote a fair and just «green transition» (Kyriazi and Miró 2022). EU policy-makers seem aware that the most pressing challenges to come are related to the interconnection between economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection (Mandelli *et al.* 2021), and that the transition to a greener economy will produce both winners and losers. Through the creation of a Just Transition Fund (JTF), the EGD also aims to alleviate some of the painful social consequences of the green transition by safeguarding, for example, hard-hit sectors, communities and workers (Gough 2022).

The nexus between the environmental and the social sphere has recently caught the attention of an increasing number of scholars in sociology and political science. Sociologists have focused in particular on the unequal distributional consequences of climate change and green policies, which tend to most significantly affect vulnerable social groups (Büchs *et al.* 2011; Gough 2017; Zachmann *et al.* 2018; Fritz *et al.* 2021). On the other hand, scholars interested in the political economy of welfare states are well aware that trade-

offs may arise when governments must face environmental and social issues simultaneously (Otto and Gugushvili 2020; Armingeon and Burgisser 2021; Mandelli *et al.* 2021), given that both policy objectives imply financial commitments for public budgets already under strain (Pierson 2001). In recent decades, European welfare states have already struggled to cater to the new social needs associated with post-industrial economic and demographic changes (Esping-Andersen 1999; Armingeon and Bonoli 2006). Globalisation, automation and technological change – along with the turn to neo-liberalism (Ferragina and Arrigoni 2021) – make it even more difficult for them to guarantee social inclusion and cohesion (Häusermann 2020; Natili and Negri 2022). Today, therefore, the social risks related to climate change and green policies emerge in a context already characterised by tight budget constraints, growing social distress and political turmoil (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2016; Kurer 2020).

Against this backdrop, recent research on public opinion has started to investigate the so-called «eco-social» divide, which refers to the tensions that emerge in respect to individual preferences for environmental and social policy objectives (Fritz and Koch 2019; Otto and Gugushvili 2020; Armingeon and Burgisser 2021; Gugushvili and Otto 2021). The basic insight of this literature is that environmental and social policies tend to have different public support bases; this will likely further deepen existing social divides if (and when) competition for scarce public resources intensifies. The emerging literature on the eco-social divide, however, has so far used the common designation «social» to conflate very different kinds of social policies, which have been previously shown to rest on different constituencies. Namely, long-established «social protection» transfers like unemployment benefits, pensions and social assistance do not pursue the same aims and are not equally appreciated by the same social groups as measures oriented towards «social investment» like education, activation and work-family reconciliation policies, which have been developed to enhance human capital and labour market participation (Hemerijck 2013; Garritzmann *et al.* 2022).

Accordingly, the EU has been particularly active in promoting the recalibration of member states' welfare systems in the direction of social investment. The latter policy strategy was first endorsed with the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and, together

with more traditional social protection objectives, is still part and parcel of the European Pillar of Social Rights launched in 2017 (de la Porte and Palier 2022). The novel environmental objectives outlined in the EGD add up to the EU's «social dimension», which places stress on social investments in human capital but also sets out to foster inclusive social protection policies in the member states (Vesan *et al.* 2021). While the literature on (national) eco-social divides emphasises the possible trade-offs between green and social policies (broadly intended), complementarities and synergies may also arise between the EU's ecological and social dimensions (Mandelli *et al.* 2021). This is especially true when considering that budgetary trade-offs between «eco» and social policy commitments are plausibly more relevant for governments' spending allocation than for EU-wide policy strategies and programmes. Despite the high relevance of environmental and social issues in the EU's agenda, however, to the best of the authors' knowledge no empirical work has so far investigated public opinion towards eco-social policy-making at the EU level.

This article aims to bridge the debates on eco-social divides and the EU's (eco-)social dimension by addressing the following research questions: Do European citizens' preferences towards EU objectives in social (protection and/or investment) and environmental matters relate or, by contrast, do significant divides exist? What kind of coalitions may be forged in support of an «eco-social Europe?» We investigate the socioeconomic determinants of citizens' preferences for EU eco-social priorities by analysing public opinion data from an original survey that was fielded in 2021 across 15 member states, and which is rich in detail on citizens' preferences on EU commitments towards various public policy areas, including green policy and both social investment and protection. Our findings identify that, overall, highly educated middle classes tend to appreciate both EU social investment and green policies, so that a potential coalition in favour of an «eco-social Europe» may exist. At the same time, lower skilled respondents and those most concerned with their job security tend to be less supportive of climate change-mitigation policies, as they are potentially afraid of the distributional consequences thereof. These socio-economic groups would prefer the EU protects their income against both pre-existing and emerging social risks. Failure to address their concerns may not only lead to

increasing inequalities, but also jeopardise the political feasibility of supranational efforts to reach a climate-neutral economy.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on the support constituencies for social protection, social investment and green policies. By discussing the strengths and weaknesses of public opinion research on the eco-social divide, the section also advances the analytical goals and the theoretical expectations that ground our analysis. Section 3 introduces the dataset, and details the operationalisation of the variables and model specification, whilst Section 4 hosts the empirical analysis. Finally, Section 5 concludes and elaborates on the implications of our findings.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. *Public opinion and EU eco-social policies*

Citizens' attitudes towards social policy have long been studied, and have even been identified as part of the explanation for the resilience of welfare states to retrenchment in the age of austerity (Brooks and Manza 2006; Pierson 2001). Given the increasing salience of environmental issues, scholars have more recently turned their attention to climate change policy (for a review, see Fairbrother 2022). However, while the vast majority of these studies regard public preferences towards national policies, only a few address public preferences towards EU policy-making. Some exceptions are found in research on general attitudes towards the intervention of the EU in social policy matters (Burgoon 2009; Gerhards *et al.* 2019; Pellegata and Visconti 2022) and, more rarely, towards specific EU-level policy proposals (Vandenbroucke *et al.* 2018; Baute and Meuleman 2020). By contrast, public opinion towards EU environmental policy remains understudied.

This article addresses this gap by examining citizens' preferences towards EU eco-social policy priorities. Over the last decade, the EU has become increasingly involved in social policy-making (Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018; Vesan *et al.* 2021) and has also brought green policy to the core of its agenda (Mandelli *et al.* 2021; Gough 2022; Kyriazi and Miró 2022). This raises the question of European citizens' opinions of EU initiatives in both social *and* environmental matters. On the

other hand, a few considerations are necessary when studying the link between public opinion and EU legislation. The latter link is in fact much weaker than that between public opinion and national public policies, since European citizens tend to perceive EU issues as distant (Duch and Taylor 1997). Moreover, and more important to our aims, people do not hold the same attitudes towards national and EU-level social interventions. The former seems to influence the latter, whereby citizens generally show more favourable attitudes towards EU social provisions when they perceive that their own country is lacking in that respect, and vice versa (Burgoon 2009; Gerhards *et al.* 2019). With this caveat in mind, we build our theoretical expectations on the socio-demographic determinants of preferences towards EU eco-social objectives on previous research on attitudes towards national social (protection/investment) and green policies.

## 2.2. *The support coalitions for social protection and social investment policies*

Over the last century, albeit with wide variations across space and time, welfare state change has been characterised by the development of two main waves of social policies, which sought to address the social risks that first accompanied the industrial economy and then the emergence of post-industrial knowledge-based economies. In the golden age of economic and welfare growth – the post-war era – governments expanded those social programmes that served to provide income-compensation to the industrial workforce (typically male breadwinners and their families) in case of unemployment, sickness, injuries, incapacity, poverty and during old age. Passive cash transfers like unemployment and pension benefits, short-time work schemes, and social assistance (hereafter «social protection» policies) served that purpose. The economic and social changes brought about by the post-industrial transformation created the need to adjust welfare provision to new social risks associated with deindustrialisation, rapid technological change, globalisation and changing family patterns (Esping-Andersen 1999; Armingeon and Bonoli 2006). Higher skill levels became necessary to find a job in knowledge-based (and more flexible) labour markets, while the combination of an ageing population

and the diffusion of dual-earner families increased the need for public policy to address work-family reconciliation issues. The second «wave» of social policies, therefore, consisted of programmes such as education and life-long learning, activation policies and care services, that is, «social investment»-oriented policies aiming at creating, mobilizing, and preserving skills (Hemerijck 2013; Garritzmann *et al.* 2022).

Building on these considerations, public opinion research has investigated citizens' attitudes towards social protection and, more recently, social investment. Three main groups of factors are generally associated with welfare attitudes: (i) material self-interest, measured through variables such as income, education, social and labour market position (e.g., Cusack *et al.*, 2006); (ii) political ideology, given that left-leaning parties and voters have traditionally been more sympathetic to social policy than their right-wing counterparts, at least in relation to redistribution through traditional social protection programmes (Iversen and Soskice 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015); and (iii) normative beliefs such as post-materialism – whereby (younger) post-materialists are less concerned with income security than (older) materialist people (Inglehart 1977).

According to Busemeyer and Neimanns (2017), among these factors self-interest is the most important, especially when it comes to choosing between different social spending priorities – i.e., social protection or investment (see also Garritzmann *et al.* 2018). Indeed, research has shown that social protection and investment policies tend to rest on different support coalitions, which are coherent with the material interests of the (potential) beneficiaries of the two groups of welfare programmes. Overall, lower-educated production workers who form what Iversen and Soskice (2019) have called the «old (industrial) middle class» are sympathetic to social protection, while younger, highly-educated «new middle classes» working in knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy, which are typically concentrated in urban agglomerates, provide the support base for social investment (Busemeyer and Neimanns 2017; Garritzmann *et al.* 2018; Bremer 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, various categories of workers

<sup>1</sup> Iversen and Soskice (2019) define the «old middle classes» as low- or semi-skilled manual workers negatively affected by skill-biased technological change and outsourcing. In opposition, they define «new middle classes» as higher-skilled workers and professionals who are better equipped to benefit from the knowledge-based

who are particularly concerned about losing their jobs, either because they are vulnerable to globalisation (for example, job loss in case of company closure or delocalisation) or rapid technological change (automation and digitalisation), are likely to be supportive of social protection (Busemeyer and Sahn 2022). Given the limited transferability of their skills and high substitutability of their jobs, routine workers in labour-intensive jobs that are easy to outsource or delocalise would in fact fear unemployment and be supportive of unemployment and social assistance benefits, on which they could likely rely in the future (Rommel and Walter 2018; Iversen and Soskice 2019). By contrast, it is more difficult to disentangle the social policy preferences of low-skilled workers providing non-offshorable essential services (e.g., personal care, cleaning, delivery, catering, transport services, etc.), who constitute an increasingly relevant socio-economic group in today's labour markets (Peugny 2019; Palier 2020). Material self-interest, in their case, is not straightforward. On the one hand, they may demand more social protection since they suffer from poor working conditions and low wages; on the other, as they are less at risk of unemployment due to globalisation or technological change they may be less supportive of unemployment benefits and more sympathetic of human-capital enhancing services that may provide them (and, in particular, their children) with more opportunities to move to better jobs (Iversen and Soskice 2019). In fact, workers directly threatened by global competition have also been shown to appreciate social investment policies such as active labour market policies (Im 2021).

To be sure, protection- and investment-oriented policies are not siloed; they often come together in multidimensional reform packages. The recent literature has revealed that differing levels of exposure to social risks not only elicit different social policy preferences, but that citizens' preferences also vary according to the specific design and mix of policies (INAPP 2022). For example, as regards EU-level policy, Vandenbroucke and his colleagues (2018) found that the implementation of a European

economy, for technological progress complements rather than substitutes their complex non-routine tasks. Iversen and Soskice (2019, p. 129) contend that, due to common economic interests and spatial proximity, «nongraduate service sector workers in large cities whose livelihood depends on the knowledge economy» are closely bound to the new middle class.

Unemployment Benefit Scheme would find larger support if it was decentralised, and, most relevant for our purpose, associated with social investment policies.

### 2.3. *Environmental (policy) risks meet «old» and «new» social risks*

Today, climate change and the potential distributional side-effects of the policies addressing it add yet another wave of social risks to the «old» and «new» social risks for which modern welfare states were developed (Johansson *et al.* 2016; Gugushvili and Otto 2021). Indeed, the risks deriving from climate change (policies) can be both direct and indirect (Gugushvili and Otto 2021). Pollution as well as natural disasters – such as floods, droughts, heatwaves and the like – *directly* affect people’s living environment, with potential consequences for health, as well as work and economic security (for example, agriculture and tourism in regions subject to serious water stress and frequent fires). On the other hand, some of the policies designed to tackle climate change *indirectly* generate social risks. As highlighted by Gugushvili and Otto (2021), the indirect risks from green policies are threefold. First, in contexts of harsh fiscal constraints green policies may be expanded to the detriment of social spending (Schaffrin 2014). This could be a source of worry, in particular, for the constituencies of social protection programmes, which take a far larger share of public budgets than social investment and are therefore likely to be targeted for spending cuts (Ronchi 2018). Second, environmental policies may hinder economic growth (Mandelli *et al.* 2021), on which the financing of the welfare state ultimately rests. Third, green policies may harm various social groups, and possibly fuel existing social inequalities (Büchs *et al.*, 2011; Gough, 2017). For example, decarbonisation will destroy jobs in the fossil fuel industries, «disproportionately affecting workers with limited transferable skills and damaging the communities built around these industries» (Gugushvili and Otto 2021, p. 3). Moreover, depending on their design, green policies can have regressive distributive outcomes (Büchs *et al.* 2011; Gough 2017; Zachmann *et al.* 2018). Two typical examples are carbon/fuel taxes or the subsidised retrofitting of private homes. The former tends to penalise low-income groups disproportionately, while the latter gives a further advantage to more affluent social groups that have the means to benefit from



green subsidies (e.g., the installation of solar panels to tame domestic energy costs in independent houses).

Given the numerous distributional implications of climate change policies, it does not come as a surprise that attitudes towards environmental policies seem to be essentially dictated by self-interest, especially when citizens must decide between prioritising redistribution or environmental protection (Armingeon and Bürgisser 2021). Green policies are generally appreciated by more economically secure, higher educated, younger, post-materialist individuals (Fritz and Koch 2019; Armingeon and Bürgisser 2021; Fairbrother 2022). Recent research has thus investigated attitudes towards (national) green and social policies together (Jakobsson *et al.* 2017; Fritz and Koch 2019; Otto and Gugushvili 2020; Gugushvili and Otto 2021). Jakobsson *et al.* (2017), in particular, contended that attitudes towards environmental protection and redistribution tend to crowd out one another, albeit with significant differences across countries. More recently, Otto and Gugushvili (2020) theorised four types of eco-social attitude groups, which empirically match with the following ideal-typical social profiles: *a) eco-social enthusiasts*, i.e., people who endorse both social and environmental measures, are prevalently highly educated women living in urban areas; *b) welfare enthusiast*, i.e., those supporting welfare policies but opposing climate change policies, are on average older low-income/education individuals living in urban areas; *c) environment devotees*, i.e., critics of welfare provision who like environmental policies, are higher-income/education people living in urban areas; finally, *d) eco-social sceptics*, i.e., those rejecting both sets of policies, are generally lower educated, less economically secure and live in rural areas. These findings suggest that it is the «new middle classes» (following the aforementioned definition proposed by Iversen and Soskice [2019]) that form the core support base of environmental policies; a proportion of them, moreover, are also sympathetic to welfare policies. This resonates with Fritz and Koch (2019, p. 14), who demonstrated that «“socio-cultural professionals” turned out to be the only class that currently supports climate and welfare policies at the same time»<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The term «socio-cultural professionals» refers to Daniel Oesch's (2006) categorisation of post-industrial social classes. Oesch contended that «horizontal» differences based on work logic (i.e., the nature and skill requirements of the tasks performed

#### 2.4. *A European eco-social investment constituency?*

The latter consideration on the plausible overlap between the «eco» and «social» constituencies brings to light a possible shortcoming of the literature on eco-social divides. That is to say, extant research in the field tends to conflate very different kinds of social policies under the common designation «social», which, as we have discussed, rest on different support bases. Long-established social protection transfers like unemployment benefits, pensions and social assistance do not pursue the same aims and are not equally appreciated by the same social groups as social investment measures like education, activation and work-family reconciliation policies. While the former are favoured by lower-skilled and more socially vulnerable individuals, the latter are supported by a broad group of people with higher education attainments and left-libertarian values (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018).

Consequently, the potential constituency for green policies has very little to do with the social groups supporting social protection; the latter would situate themselves as «welfare enthusiasts» or even «eco-social sceptics», in Otto and Gugushvili's (2020) terms. Similarly, those vulnerable groups who are afraid of losing their social status due to trends associated with globalisation and technological change, and who are also likely to pay a disproportionately high price for (regressive) green policies (Fritz *et al.* 2021), would remain sceptic towards the latter while preferring social protection as a potentially useful buffer in the case of job or income loss. By contrast, there are many socio-economic similarities between the ideal-typical constituencies of green and social investment policies. Both groups generally consist of highly educated, younger, post-materialist individuals who fare relatively well in the knowledge-economy that flourishes in large urban conglomer-

at work) are equally as important as «vertical» differences based on the level of marketable skills (and, thus, potential wages) in order to account for class stratification in post-industrial societies. In Oesch's classification «socio-cultural professionals» are highly qualified and act along an «interpersonal work logic»; that is to say, they are employed in high-grade service jobs requiring high levels of expertise and communication skills, and are characterised by a high degree of independence from standardised work and command structures. Although it is somewhat narrower (being defined in more detail), this group certainly overlaps with Iversen and Soskice's (2019) concept of high-skilled «new middle classes».

ates. Hence, we contend that the overlap between the welfare and the green constituencies – Otto and Gugushvili’s category of «eco-social enthusiasts» – is best understood in the light of the commonalities shared by green and social investment policies and their supporters (based on shared interests and, possibly, also normative predispositions). In other words, it is not simply eco-social, but more specifically eco-social *investment* policies that may find a common support coalition across Europe.

We summarise our theoretical expectations in the following hypotheses:

H1: Highly educated «new» middle classes support EU social investment and green policies, while lower-skilled and more economically vulnerable individuals prefer social protection.

H2: Those who feel that their jobs are threatened by global competition and technological change prefer the EU to focus on social protection over green and social investment policies.

Following from this, in light of the theorised similarities and differences in the socio-economic determinants of preferences towards the three distinct types of policies, the emergence of a coalition supporting European eco and social investment policies would appear to be more plausible than one supporting eco and social protection measures.

### 3. Data and methods

The data used in the empirical part of this article were collected as part of an original cross-national survey fielded in 15 EU countries plus the UK<sup>3</sup> in June-July 2021 in the framework of the research project SOLID («Policy Crisis and Crisis Politics, Sovereignty, Solidarity and Identity in the EU Post-2008»). The national samples were obtained using a quota design based on gender, age, area of residence and education and include more than 2,000 respondents per country. The main survey items used in the analyses shown below, however, were asked only to a subsample of respondents (the «social crisis

<sup>3</sup> Austria, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden. The UK has been excluded from the analysis because of the lack of variables about EU integration.

module»), consisting of 12,816 observations before excluding missing values (see Appendix A.1).

The main dependent variables were based on the question: «Think about the role of the European Union in coordinating and setting common goals for member states' welfare policies. In your opinion, which two of the following social policy areas should the EU prioritise?». Interviewees were asked to tick a maximum of two options from a list. Starting from this, a tetrachoric<sup>4</sup> exploratory factor analysis permits us to identify three main factors according to what individuals think the EU should prioritise<sup>5</sup>:

*Green policies:*

- Transition to a green economy

*Social investment:*

- Education and training programmes
- Creating jobs and unemployment opportunities for young people

*Social protection:*

- Social protection for the unemployed
- Paid furlough schemes for companies undergoing temporary crises
- Social assistance to the poor

Based on these factors, we generated three dependent variables by taking the mean of the corresponding dichotomous variables and subsequently standardising them. Details about both the original and the derived factors can be found in Appendix A.1.

The analyses include three main sets of independent variables. The first set consists of basic socio-demographic variables: *sex* (male, female), *education* (low, middle, high), *age* (18-24, 25-54, 55+), *urban/rural* (Rural area or village, Small or middle size town, Large town). Second, we employed two variables capturing *employment status* (Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self-employed, Retired, Unemployed) and *occupa-*

<sup>4</sup> This was necessary because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables.

<sup>5</sup> Results of the factor analysis show that the policy option «Digitalisation of the economy» and «Transition to a green economy» are highly correlated with each other. This seems to lend support to H2, since respondents apparently tend to similarly consider both the green transition and digitalisation, and, by implication, the risks they entail. However, in order to ensure the consistency of the «green policies» factor we chose not to include the item about digitalisation. In any case, even with that indicator included, the results remain consistent with those presented below.

*tional class* (Small business owners, Higher-grade service, Clerical service workers, Lower-grade service workers, Production workers, Not in work/No answer)<sup>6</sup>. Third, we employed two variables to identify the interviewees' perception of their jobs being threatened by *automation* («How likely do you think it is that your work skills will become outdated or that your job will be replaced by new technologies in the next five years?») or *globalisation* («How likely do you think it is that you will lose your job due to your company being relocated abroad or closed down due to competition from foreign companies?»). In both cases, respondents had to answer using a 4-point scale (very likely, somewhat likely, not likely, not likely at all).

Starting from this, we estimated three sets of models for each of the three dependent variables:

- Set 1: Sociodemographic variables (M1)
- Set 2: Employment status *or* occupational class (alternatively) + sociodemographic variables (M2, M3)
- Set 3: Job likely threatened by automation *or* globalisation (alternatively) + sociodemographic variables (M4, M5)

Given the structure of the main question, which explicitly asked what the EU should prioritise, a control variable measuring the general opinion toward EU integration is present in all three sets of models. This variable is based on a widely used question: «Some say European integration should be pushed forward. Others say it has already gone too far. How do you feel about this?». Possible answers range from 0 to 10, where 0 means «European integration has already gone too far» and 10 means «European integration should be pushed further». Moreover, we used country-fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity across the 15 EU member states included in the survey, which is especially relevant in view of previous empirical works highlighting that the national welfare context influences attitudes towards EU social policy (Burgoon 2009; Gerhards *et al.* 2019).

<sup>6</sup> «Small business owners» includes shop-owners, craftsman, self-employed technicians or repairmen, farmers/foresters/fishermen; «Higher-grade service» includes self-employed and employed professionals in technical, business, legal, administrative and socio-cultural sectors as well as managers; «Clerical service workers» are civil servants, office clerks and middle-management employees; «Lower-grade service workers» are employees in labour-intensive service jobs (which are usually based on standardised tasks); «Production workers» are manual workers and supervisors/foremen in manual work.

#### 4. Unpacking public opinion towards green, social investment and social protection policies

The empirical bulk of this paper revolves around the sets of models introduced previously. In order to ease the presentation of the results, we report the full set of models in the Appendix (A.2), and we focus here on the predicted values associated with the main variables of interest. Figure 1 focuses on the sociodemographic characteristics, presenting three main takeaways: first, not surprisingly, the education level is a crucial predictor of preferences over redistributive and social policies. The higher the education level, the higher the support for EU green and social investment policy priorities, while the opposite is true regarding social protection policies, which are mostly supported by individuals with a lower educational background. Interestingly, older people tend to be less supportive of social protection policies, while the young (18-24) are the most supportive towards social investment and green objectives. People residing in larger towns and/or in rural areas tend to only be slightly more supportive towards green policies compared to people living in small or middle size towns, while the opposite is true concerning social protection policies. Overall, these preliminary results suggest that the constituencies supportive of green policies and social protection policies tend to diverge, while some degree of overlap may exist concerning social investment and green objectives.

Employment status also affects preferences towards both social *and* green policies (Figure 2). The unemployed are the occupational group most supportive of social protection and, at the same time, those who tend to exhibit less support for green transition policies and (less so) social investment. The opposite is true for pensioners and the self-employed, who tend to support investment in human capital and green policies much more than compensatory policies. Differences between occupational classes are more nuanced. However, it seems that both production workers and lower-grade service workers prefer welfare over green policies. More precisely, the latter group tend to be more supportive of social investment policies, while manual workers favour social protection benefits – a result that resonates with Bremer’s (2022) findings. Conversely, those working in higher-grade skill-intensive services seem to prefer green plus social investment policies

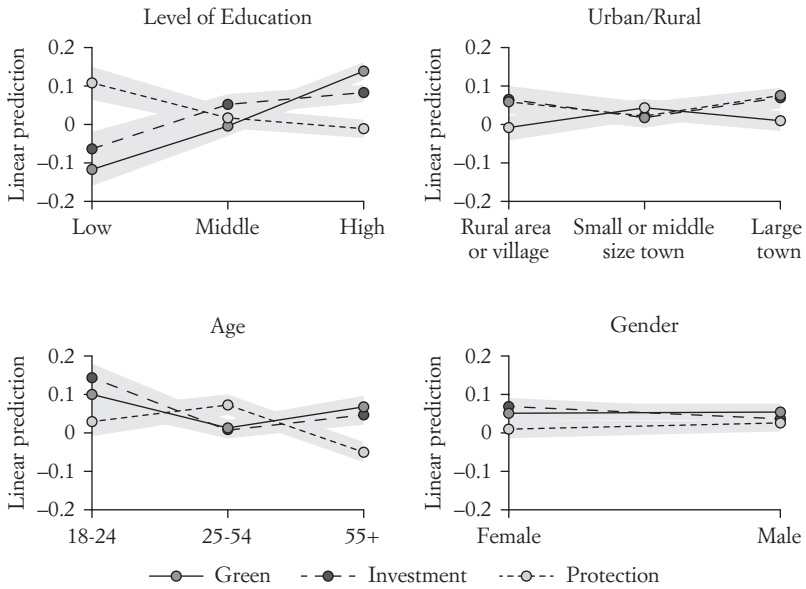


FIGURE 1. Predicted preferences for green, social investment and social protection policies depending on sociodemographic characteristics (M1).

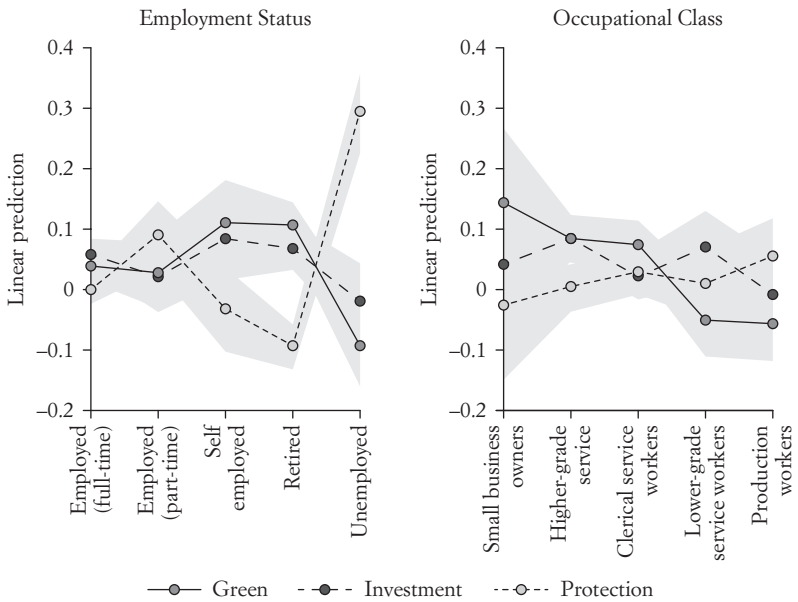


FIGURE 2. Predicted preferences for green, social investment and social protection policies depending on employment status and occupational class (M2, M3).

over social protection. Lower-grade service workers (i.e., those employed in labour-intensive service jobs like, for example, catering and care work) would prioritise social investment over green EU objectives.

Finally, as Figure 3 illustrates, respondents who are concerned about losing their job due to automation or global competition have clear-cut preferences for the EU giving priority to social (especially protection, but also investment) rather than green policy objectives, since they plausibly pay much more attention to the guarantee of income protection in the case of unemployment. These social categories seem to perceive a particularly harsh trade-off between investment in social protection and in green policies.

Table 1 summarises the main results of our analyses. Education level, employment status and being concerned about job security due to globalisation are the factors that mostly explain preferences over green, social investment and social protection policies. Respondents with a higher educational level, who are employed and who are not afraid of losing their jobs because of globalisation tend to support green and social investment policies, while the low-skilled, the unemployed, and those who feel at risk of losing their jobs due to globalisation or technological change instead prefer social protection policies. Although the effect size is lower, our results also outline that production workers prefer social protection policies; these workers are also suspicious of investing in the green transition and human-capital enhancing social investment policies. Overall, these findings suggest that, whereas a trade-off exists between social protection and green policies, this is not true for social investment policies.

Finally, Figure 4 graphically summarises preferences towards green policies, social investment and social protection of three ideal-typical social class profiles. The latter builds on the aforementioned work by Iversen and Soskice (2019) on changing class structures in post-industrial capitalism. The «new middle classes» are highly-educated respondents living in large towns and working in the high-grade/skill-intensive service sector; the «old» middle class is defined as low-educated production workers living in a rural area or in a village. We also add a third class profile for the «lower-skilled service class» (middle-educated respondents who work in lower-grade/labour intensive services in large towns, in jobs that are rarely exposed to



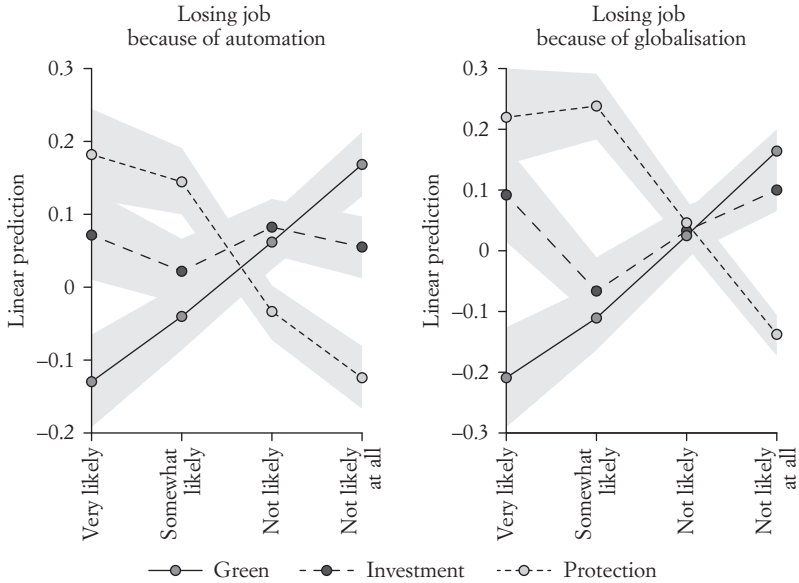


FIGURE 3. Predicted preferences for green, social investment and social protection policies depending on respondents' concern for job security due to automation or global competition (M4, M5).

TABLE 1. *The potential social constituencies of green, social investment and social protection policies*

	Green	Investment	Protection	Effect size
<i>Socio-Demographics</i>				
Education	Higher	Higher	Lower	Large
Age	18-24	18-24	25-54	Medium
Urban/Rural	Large Town	Large Town	Small middle town	Small size
Gender	No difference	No difference	No difference	Null
<i>Employment/occupation</i>				
Employment status	Other than unemployed	Other than unemployed	Unemployed	Big
<i>Occupational class</i>				
Small bus. owners, high/ clerical services	High/low services	Production workers	Medium	
<i>Threatened by globalisation or automation</i>				
Concerned with losing job because of automation	Not likely at all	Not likely	Very likely	Medium
Concerned with losing job because of globalisation	Not likely at all	Not likely at all	Very likely	Large

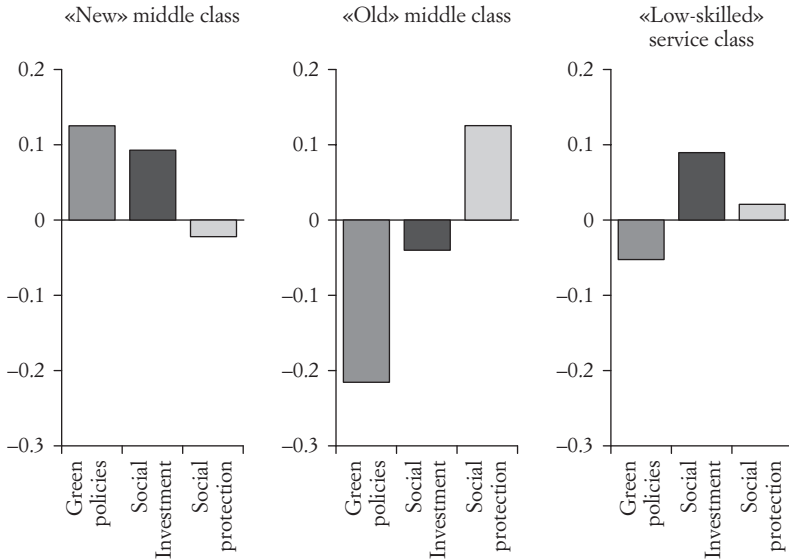


FIGURE 4. Social classes and predicted preferences over green policies, social investment and social protection.

*Note:* «new» middle class: highly-educated respondents living in large towns and working in the high-grade/skill-intensive service sector. «Old» middle class: low-educated production workers living in a rural area or in a village. «Lower-skilled» service class: middle-educated respondents working in lower-grade/labour intensive services in large towns.

global competition). According to Iversen and Soskice (2019), the fate of the latter social group is closely bound to that of the new middle classes, since lower-skilled workers provide services (for example, catering, cleaning or care services for dual-earner households) whose demand essentially depends on the flourishing of new-middle-class jobs in urban agglomerates. On the other hand, Palier (2020) highlighted that low-skilled workers providing essential services tend to remain «trapped» in «lousy» jobs characterised by precarious working conditions and low wages. As these workers constitute a relevant segment of today's post-industrial labour markets (Peugny 2019), it is important to also capture their opinion on the emerging eco-social divides.

The policy preferences shown in Figure 4 help clarify the class alignments that may plausibly support European eco-social investment policies. The stark contrast between the «new» and

«old» middle classes is apparent; the former would prefer EU agenda oriented towards eco-social investment policy objectives, while the latter would like the EU to prioritise social protection over green or social investment policies. The lower-skilled service class seems to take a mid-way position, which could be crucial to tip the balance of the political demand for EU eco-social policies. Based on our analysis, as shown in Figure 4, workers in lower-skilled services appear to be somewhat agnostic toward green and social protection policies (although discernible, the trade-off between these two policies appears much less marked than for the «old» middle class) but they align with the new middle class in respect of a shared preference for EU social investment priorities. The same pattern holds if one excludes urban/rural area of residence from the profile prediction (See Figure A.3 in the Appendix).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This article has explored whether the support coalitions for EU objectives regarding green, social investment and social protection policies are similar. Our results ascertain that, overall, high-educated middle classes appreciate both EU social investment and green policies, while lower-skilled «old» middle classes prefer social protection and would not like the EU to frontload green policies on its agenda (H1). The preferences of respondents who are concerned with losing their job to either automation or global competition (two big challenges of post-industrial welfare capitalism) coincide with those of the old middle class: the divide (anti-)green/(pro-) social protection is even more marked when one focuses specifically on these social risks (H2). Hence, EU eco-social initiatives are likely to be supported by a coalition of high-educated new middle-class Europeans, who appreciate both social investment and green policies. Lower educated production workers and/or those who think their jobs are at risk due to globalisation may, by contrast, feel very distant from the green priorities recently established by the EU.

Overall, these results suggest that social groups in Europe perceive a trade-off between a transition towards a more climate neutral economy and social protection (but not social investment). This may also depend on how political elites frame the

debate; recent research conducted in Italy outlines that employers' organisations are among the most active pressure groups promoting a green transition, but their policy proposals do not envisage any form of social compensation measures for those groups that are negatively affected by this transition (Natili *et al.* 2022). The diffuse scepticism towards green policy not only among production and vulnerable workers but also among the low-skilled urban service class (see Figure 4; Palier 2020) further underlines the importance of policies to mitigate the distributive side effects of green policies. If, on the one hand, it is true that workers in the low-skill end of the service sector share a preference for EU social investment objectives with the new middle class, they also show an inclination towards disliking environmental policy and favouring social protection. The latter attitude brings them closer to the most vulnerable classes in terms of perceiving a trade-off between green and social protection policy objectives. At a time of increasing inequalities, which is a gloomy yet very likely prospect given the ongoing energy crisis, the width of social groups that do not see the point of investing resources in environmental protection when it is social protection that is mostly needed may thus increase and erode the political bases of the EU green agenda. Consequently, social compensation for the various categories of losers of the green transition is vital in making the objectives of the EU not only environmentally but also socially and politically sustainable, since the perverse distributional effects of the green transition may provide a breeding ground for different forms of populism and Euroscepticism.

The launch of the EGD and the earmarking of at least 30% of NGEU funds for tackling climate change and supporting green projects both mark an important step in that direction from the EU. Alongside decarbonisation objectives, the EU has also acknowledged the imperative to stem the potential inequalities caused by this policy endeavour, not least with the adoption of the JTF to safeguard hard-hit sectors, communities and workers (Gough 2022). An attempt to address the interrelations between environmental, economic and social policy goals can also be detected in the «new» European Semester 2020 (Mandelli *et al.* 2021). Finally, the Next Generation EU plan and the related Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) openly aims to ensure a «green» recovery, as at least 37 per cent of the funds must be earmarked for climate action and

be accompanied by reforms that will maximise the impact of these investments. Overall, a political discourse aimed at explicitly recognising the need to accompany the green transition with social protection measures may facilitate the formation of new, broader coalitions willing to support a novel policy agenda combining measures to mitigate climate change and redistribution at both the EU level and in the member states. In this respect, some scholars have recently started to discuss social policy proposals for fighting increasing inequality and improving the political acceptability of decarbonisation, by also elaborating on their possible contribution to an eco-social recalibration of welfare (see, for example, «eco-participation» income: Laruffa *et al.* 2022).

For the moment, however, our research has highlighted that in Europe it would be easier to forge an «eco-social investment constituency». This may also be due to the fact that environmental and social investment policies have another point in common: they are both based on current investments that are expected to yield returns in the future, especially in the case of education (expected to boost human capital in the long run, i.e., to provide better opportunities for today's pupils in tomorrow's labour markets) and decarbonisation policies – whereby the transition to clean energy is unavoidably a very long process (on the future-orientation of social investment, see, for example, Kvist 2017). This may generate further synergies between the «eco» and the «social investment» constituencies. Firstly, the future-orientation of the two types of policies may be best appreciated by higher-educated people who are not much concerned with economic security in the here-and-now. Second, younger cohorts may be more attentive to green and social investments than the elderlies, not just for normative beliefs related to post-materialist values, but also for sheer self-interest; they would hope to be able to benefit from future outcomes of eco-social investment policies in later stages of their life. Although this theoretical expectation needs to be directly tested in future research, the similar temporal perspective makes us even more confident that the younger, more highly educated «new» middle classes could form the core support-coalition for eco-social investment policies.

Three limitations concerning our dependent variables should be considered. On the more substantial side, the survey item we use does not capture the multidimensionality of policy

preferences that can vary based on the specific design or combination of green, investment and social protection measures (cf. INAPP 2022), nor does it confront respondents with clear-cut trade-offs between different policies as in, for example, in Busemeyer and Garritzmann (2017). Moreover, the study does not precisely question individual attitudes toward green, social investment or protection programmes; instead, it asks about what the EU should prioritise in coordinating and establishing common goals for the member states. On the one hand, studying public opinion towards *EU-level* eco-social objectives represents a novelty in the literature. On the other, we want to stress that it would be a mistake to read our results as individual attitudes toward a variety of specific policies, as is often the case in studies focusing on national-level policies. Lastly, on the more methodological side, our three dependent variables are based on a different number of indicators (three, two and one respectively); this, together with the fact that interviewees had to choose a maximum of two answers, made the range of ranges of variation different among the three. The distortive effect of this has been contained by standardising the variables. Further research and survey programmes with more detailed questions on citizens' attitudes towards both national and EU eco-social policies are thus welcome. Moreover, broader cross-country comparative designs are needed to allow an assessment of the role of contextual characteristics in shaping eco-social attitudes. These various ways forward for empirical research will be fundamental in digging deeper into a topic that is becoming increasingly central in both the public and academic debate.

## Appendix

Appendix A.1. *Original variables and derived factors*

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Original variables</i>					
Education and training programmes	12,816	0.21	0.41	0	1
Creating jobs and employment opportunities for young people	12,816	0.39	0.49	0	1
Social protection for the unemployed	12,816	0.16	0.37	0	1
Paid furlough schemes for companies undergoing temporary crises	12,816	0.09	0.28	0	1
Guaranteeing adequate minimum wages in all member states	12,816	0.39	0.49	0	1
Social assistance to the poor	12,816	0.20	0.40	0	1
Transition to a green economy	12,816	0.19	0.39	0	1
Digitalisation of the economy	12,816	0.06	0.24	0	1
None of the above	12,816	0.02	0.15	0	1
Don't know	12,816	0.07	0.25	0	1
<i>Derived factors</i>					
Social protection	12,816	0.00	1.00	-0.75	2.59
Social investment	12,816	0.00	1.00	-0.97	2.23
Green policies	12,816	0.00	1.00	-0.48	2.09

Appendix A.2. *Full models*

	Social Protection				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Male ( <i>ref: female</i> )	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02
Education: Middle ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.05	-0.03
Education: High ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	-0.15***	-0.14***	-0.14***	-0.10**	-0.08*
Age: 25-54 ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	0.05*	0.08**	0.06**	-0.02	-0.02
Age: 55+ ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	-0.10***	-0.04	-0.10***	-0.11**	-0.07
Small or middle size town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Large town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
Employed (part-time) ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.07*			
Self-employed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.02			
Other ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.06*			
Retired ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.05			
Unemployed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.26***			
Higher-grade service ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.02		
Clerical service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.02		
Lower-grade service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.01		

	Social Protection				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Production workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.05		
Not in work/NA ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.04		
Skills outdated [...]: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.04	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.22***	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.31***	
Skills outdated [...]: Don't know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.15*	
Lose job [...] competition: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.00
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.18***
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.38***
Lose job because of competition: Don't know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.14*
France ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.08
Finland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.19***	0.18***	0.19***	0.12	0.12
Germany ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.01
Greece ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.16***	0.14**	0.16***	0.10	0.10
Hungary ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.02	0.01
Poland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.01
Ireland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.06	-0.08
Italy ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.14**	0.11**	0.14**	0.13	0.10
Latvia ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.09	-0.12
Netherlands ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.16***	0.15***	0.16***	0.11	0.10
Portugal ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.11**	0.09*	0.11**	-0.02	-0.03
Romania ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.25***	-0.24***	-0.25***	-0.33***	-0.35***
Spain ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.35***	0.33***	0.35***	0.28***	0.26***
Sweden ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.24***	0.23***	0.24***	0.24***	0.24***
EU integration (0-10)	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.00	-0.00
Constant	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.25***	0.30***
N	9,506	9,506	9,506	5,419	5,419

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .



	Social Investment				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Male ( <i>ref: female</i> )	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.01	-0.00
Education: Middle ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	0.10***	0.10***	0.10***	0.11**	0.11**
Education: High ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.11***	0.11***
Age: 25-54 ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	-0.16***	-0.19***	-0.16***	-0.08**	-0.09**
Age: 55+ ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	-0.06**	-0.13***	-0.06**	-0.05	-0.07
Small or middle size town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	-0.06**	-0.06**	-0.06**	-0.11***	-0.10***
Large town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.05	-0.04
Employed (part-time) ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.02			
Self-employed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.02			
Other ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.08**			
Retired ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.06*			
Unemployed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.09**			
Higher-grade service ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.07		
Clerical service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.03		
Lower-grade service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.06		
Production workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.01		
Not in work/NA ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			0.04		
Skills outdated [...]: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.04	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.05	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.04	
Skills outdated [...]: Don't know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				-0.27***	
Lose job [...] competition: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.13**
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.02
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.08
Lose job [...] competition: Dont'know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					-0.09
France ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.18***	-0.18***	-0.18***	-0.18**	-0.16**
Finland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.08
Germany ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.19***	-0.18***	-0.19***	-0.21***	-0.19**
Greece ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.19***	0.21***	0.20***	0.20***	0.21***
Hungary ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02
Poland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.10*	0.10*	0.10*	0.10	0.13*
Ireland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.28***	0.29***	0.28***	0.33***	0.34***
Italy ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.13**	0.15***	0.13**	0.13	0.15*

	Social Investment				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Latvia ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.17***	0.17***	0.16***	0.13*	0.16**
Netherlands ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.13**	-0.13**	-0.14**	-0.13*	-0.12
Portugal ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.17***	0.18***	0.17***	0.19***	0.21***
Romania ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.52***	0.51***	0.52***	0.45***	0.47***
Spain ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.09*	0.11**	0.10*	0.10	0.13*
Sweden ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.08	-0.07
EU integration (0-10)	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*
Constant	-0.06	-0.01	-0.10	-0.11	-0.11
N	9,506	9,506	9,506	5,419	5,419

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

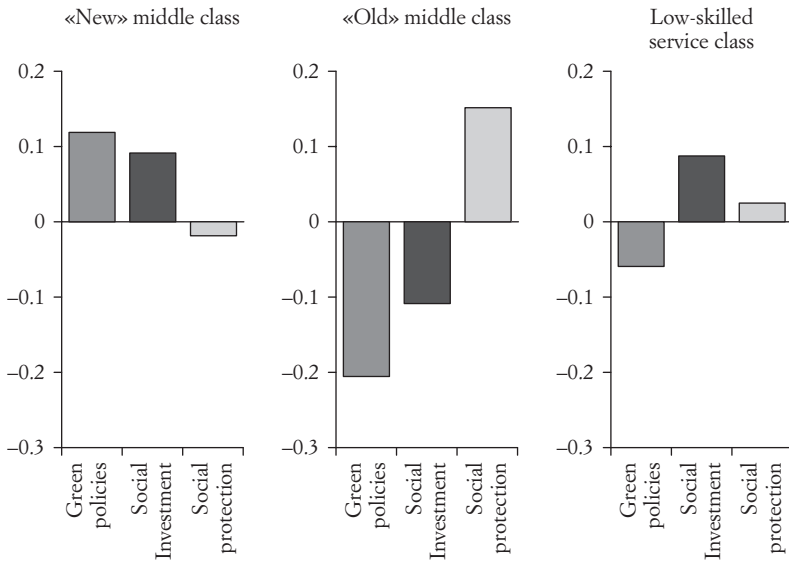
	Green policies				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Male ( <i>ref: female</i> )	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.02	-0.01
Education: Middle ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.10**	0.08*
Education: High ( <i>ref: Low</i> )	0.29***	0.29***	0.28***	0.22***	0.21***
Age: 25-54 ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	-0.07**	-0.07**	-0.07**	-0.02	-0.02
Age: 55+ ( <i>ref: 18-24</i> )	-0.01	-0.04	-0.02	0.02	-0.01
Small or middle size town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.01
Large town ( <i>ref: Rural area or village</i> )	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02
Employed (part-time) ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.04			
Self-employed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.09*			
Other ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.00			
Retired ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		0.05			
Unemployed ( <i>ref: Employed (full-time)</i> )		-0.07			
Higher-grade service ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.12		
Clerical service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.10		
Lower-grade service workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.18**		
Production workers ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.19**		
Not in work/NA ( <i>ref: Small business owners</i> )			-0.12		
Skills outdated [...]: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.12**	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.19***	
Skills outdated [...]: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.30***	
Skills outdated [...]: Don't know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )				0.12	

	Green policies				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Lose job [...] competition: Somewhat likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.13**
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.24***
Lose job [...] competition: Not likely at all ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.38***
Lose job [...] competition: Dont'know ( <i>ref: Very likely</i> )					0.14*
France ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.17**	0.18**
Finland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.11	-0.12
Germany ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.17***	-0.17***	-0.17***	-0.15*	-0.14*
Greece ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.40***	-0.39***	-0.40***	-0.28***	-0.28***
Hungary ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.07	-0.07
Poland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.13*
Ireland ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.13**	-0.12**	-0.12**	-0.01	0.01
Italy ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.22***	-0.21***	-0.22***	-0.14*	-0.12
Latvia ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.39***	-0.39***	-0.39***	-0.29***	-0.27***
Netherlands ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.11	0.11
Portugal ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.38***	-0.38***	-0.38***	-0.25***	-0.24***
Romania ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.52***	-0.52***	-0.51***	-0.36***	-0.34***
Spain ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.46***	-0.45***	-0.46***	-0.32***	-0.31***
Sweden ( <i>ref: Austria</i> )	-0.07	-0.06	-0.06	0.06	0.05
EU integration (0-10)	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.03***
Constant	-0.08	-0.07	0.04	-0.32***	-0.41***
N	9,506	9,506	9,506	5,419	5,419

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

## Appendix A.3.

Social classes and preferences over green policies, social investment and social protection (urban/rural dimension excluded). Robustness check for Figure 4.



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### **A European eco-social investment constituency? Unpacking public opinion towards EU green, social investment and social protection policies in 15 countries**

*Summary:* After years of deepening of the so-called European social dimension, green policies to reduce pollution and mitigate the consequences of climate change have recently taken pride of place in the EU's agenda. What do citizens think of EU green and social policy objectives? Do public preferences for these two policy areas relate, or, by contrast, do trade-offs emerge? Recent research has in fact highlighted that an «eco-social divide» – i.e., a trade-off in public support for social and green policies – is likely to emerge in advanced welfare states. This article bridges the debates on eco-social divides and the EU (eco-)social dimension by analysing original data collected in 2021 across 15 member states. Extant empirical studies on the eco-social divide have conflated all kinds of social policies into a single «social» dimension. We distinguish between preferences towards different types of social policies, which find support among different constituencies: social investment (education, activation, childcare) and social protection (cash transfers to those out of work). Our findings reveal that highly educated middle classes form the core of a potential coalition supporting an «eco-social Europe», as they appreciate both EU social investment and green policies. Lower skilled respondents and those most concerned with job security are generally less supportive of green policies, being potentially afraid of their distributional consequences, and favour social protection against both «old» and «new» social risks. Failure to address their concerns may not only lead to increasing inequalities, but also erode the political bases of the EU green agenda.

JEL Classification: P16 - Welfare State; Q56 - Environment and Development; Z13 - Social and Economic Stratification; Z18 - Public Policy; O52 - Europe.

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