



REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

Overview of projects

InDivEU - Integrating Diversity in the European Union

Overview of findings

Differentiated integration can be defined as a form of European integration involving the limitation of the validity of legal norms to a subset of EU member states. It allows interested countries to move forward with new policies while granting temporary or permanent exceptions to countries unable or unwilling to comply. Well-known examples are the Schengen area, the Euro area, the European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO), and the Permanent Structured Cooperation in security matters (PESCO).

[InDivEU](#) has tracked the historical evolution and present relevance of differentiation in the European Union through the use of five quantitative datasets and many qualitative case studies. The evidence shows that differentiation is a relatively common feature of EU law, currently affecting 4.6 per cent of opportunities in the Treaties and 2.0 per cent of opportunities in legislative acts. It is particularly prevalent in six countries (Denmark, the UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Romania) and in areas such as border management, agriculture, monetary policy, justice, and the free movement of services.

From a political point of view, differentiated integration has proved to be an indispensable tool to promote further integration in an increasingly diverse European Union. On the one hand, it can be used to bypass the opposition of reluctant countries. On the other hand, it can accommodate vital national conditions and preferences, enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of the resulting policies. At the same time, it has many disadvantages: it may yield suboptimal overall benefits; it may produce negative consequences for 'outsiders' (material damages, loss of decision-making rights); it tends to increase regulatory and institutional complexity; and it may undermine the sense of unity and solidarity among EU states and citizens.

Over the past decade, many political actors and commentators have pointed to differentiated integration as a possible way forward for the future of the European Union. As a contribution to this debate, the InDivEU project has developed **two sets of scenarios** for the medium-term future of the EU.

The set [European Landscapes 2035](#) presents four narrative scenarios related to the internal evolution of the EU:

- Highland Europe (uniform integration)
- Mountainous Europe (differentiated integration)
- Lowland Europe (uniform disintegration)
- Archipelago Europe (differentiated disintegration)

The set [Love thy neighbour 2035](#) presents instead three analytical scenarios related to the relations of the EU with its external neighbourhood:

- Extended Family (enlargement)
- Close-knit Community (external integration)
- Good Fences Make Good Neighbours (external disintegration)

Each of these scenarios helps readers to visualize a 'possible future' with specific opportunities and challenges, stimulating an informed debate about their economic and political desirability.



EU IDEA - EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness

Overview of findings

The central concept of [EU IDEA](#) is **differentiation**, defined as any modality of integration or cooperation that allows states (members of the European Union and non-members) and sub-state entities to work together in non-homogeneous, flexible ways. This broad definition allows for a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach capturing the various shapes that differentiation takes in the EU context. First, it accounts for the commonly held understanding that differentiation occurs when some EU members, potentially joined by non-EU members, further integrate within the *acquis communautaire*, or cooperate beyond the existing *acquis communautaire*, or partly opt out of it, which creates arrangements whose membership differs from formal EU membership. Second, the definition makes clear that members or actors of differentiation in the EU are not necessarily states but that various sub-state actors, including regulators or local authorities, and transnational networks may be involved in these processes. Last but not least, our definition is open to a crucial feature of differentiation that is widely neglected in the literature, namely that differentiated cooperation manifests itself not necessarily in different levels of legal integration, but also at an organisational level, through non-homogeneous participation in the institutional venues where EU-related policies are designed and implemented.

EU IDEA offers an innovative and comprehensive assessment of differentiation's impact on EU governance ([Pirozzi and Bonomi 2021](#)). It addresses the organisational, constitutional and socio-political factors affecting differentiation and integration in the EU to assess the effectiveness, sustainability, accountability and legitimacy of differentiated arrangements within the EU and between the EU and participating third countries. The aim is to provide an overall appraisal of how much and what form of differentiation propels European integration forward – as a whole and for specific policy areas – and what kinds of differentiation should be avoided to prevent disintegration. Empirical research showed that formal arrangements of differentiation are not only compatible with, but also conducive to a more effective, cohesive and democratic EU when they have a direct link to EU institutions, are established with clear objectives in line with EU core values, and are equipped with adequate mechanisms to ensure accountability and to connect ins and outs. On the contrary, excessive flexibility entailed in looser forms of differentiated cooperation that are established outside the EU Treaties are likely to produce fragmentation and jeopardise the EU's political unity and normative consistency.

Differentiation and differentiated integration have been and will remain necessities if Europe wants to overcome stalemate and improve the functioning of the European integration process. The central question is thus not whether there will be a differentiated Europe, but what it will or rather should look like. EU IDEA has developed and evaluated **five potential scenarios** for a “differentiated EUrope 2035” ([Emmanouilidis 2021](#)):

1. status quo differentiation;
2. muddling upwards;
3. fundamental disruption of differentiation;
4. creation of an inner core;
5. a new supranational union.

Without trying to predict the future, the project identifies key factors determining the future of a “differentiated EUrope” and comes to the conclusion that the EU and its members are likely to prefer the “muddling upwards” scenario rather than more radical forms of differentiation. However, future crises might force Europe in another direction, compelling governments to depart from business as usual.

EU3D - Differentiation, Dominance, Democracy

Project overview

The [EU3D project](#) starts from the assumption that the European Union has gone through a remarkable development, expanding in depth and breadth across a wide range of member states that differ considerably in their structural-institutional, territorial, functional, cultural, and linguistic compositions. Some of this diversity enters the integration process, which has become more differentiated over time.

EU3D accordingly looks at **differentiation**, which is not tied to any specific direction of change but encompasses both integration and disintegration. The projects sets out to investigate what are the democratic potentials and the dominance (i.e. arbitrary rule) pitfalls of differentiation in today's EU. It looks at the conditions under which differentiation is politically acceptable, institutionally sustainable, and democratically legitimate. Equally important, EU3D specifies the conditions under which it is not, in other words when conditions of dominance prevail.

EU3D singles out those issues and issue-areas that are particularly problematic from a dominance perspective. The focus is on the Euro and refugee crises, which span across economic governance (fiscal, monetary and banking policy) and the role and status of refugees (basic rights, border controls, terrorist and other security threats).

EU3D's second part is devoted to tapping public sentiments and discerning and assessing democratic reforms. It focuses on the social and institutional conditions for improving the EU's capacity and resilience. That includes questioning the social basis for reforms through surveying individuals both in terms of what they see as the main problems facing the EU and in terms of what constitutional visions they prefer or reject (a two-tiered Union, a federal type Union or a Union of multiple speeds). EU3D also focuses on the role of media as core conveyers of information on what the EU is, as well as institutional proponents of democratic reforms – parliaments and regional/municipal actors, coupled with a broad assessment of future of Europe reform proposals.

By singling out those forms of differentiation that engender dominance, EU3D aims to provide important knowledge of the conditions under which reforms may fail or succeed. It provides benchmarks for determining which polity models are viable and which ones are not.



This project has received funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 programme under Grant Agreement no. 822419.

About DiCE



DiCE establishes a large, open and inclusive research network designed to ensure that state-of-the-art research on differentiation is translated into policy advice made accessible to policy-makers at European, national and regional levels. DiCE clusters three large EU-funded research projects on differentiation and the dynamics of integration: EU3D, InDivEU and EU IDEA. The three Research and Innovation Actions, as well as the DiCE project, are funded by the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union.

More information on DiCE activities can be found at <https://www.dice.uio.no/>



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870789.