

## <a> Chapter Six. Socio-economic practices of households coping with hardship

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### <b> Introduction

The 2008 crisis and austerity policies have directly affected mostly low and middle income households, especially in countries that were heavily impacted such as Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal. In some cases it intensified existing hardship, while in other cases it pushed previously well-off people into poverty as discussed by Dagdeviren et al. (2017) in a paper comparing ‘the old and the new poor in Europe’. Experiences of hardship, however, were not always directly related to the 2008 financial crisis and the austerity policies. Crises were sometimes linked to political conflict as demonstrated in the case of Turkey. The forced migration of Kurds in the 1990s and more recent years was a factor that compelled hundreds of thousands of people to leave their villages and move to large cities in different parts of Turkey which has continued to cause hardship. The Syrian conflict caused a similar humanitarian crisis in Turkey as the largest recipients of Syrian refugees (Şengül and Aytekin 2015). The Greek case also contained stories of migration and hardship, particularly concerning refugees from the Middle East (Kambouri et al. 2015). Crises can also strike through homelessness or redundancy, putting pressure on families, creating emotional, financial and social instability, lack of direction and uncertainty (see chapter nine).

This chapter deals specifically with the socio-economic practices of vulnerable households in the face of crises and hardship with a view to reflect on ‘resilience’ as detailed in chapters four and five of this book. The analysis is based on the data obtained from nine European countries through semi-structured interviews that were conducted as part of RESCuE project (see chapter one). The households<sup>i</sup> that participated in the study were predominantly from low-income backgrounds. Within this there was a mix of households with at least one member in work, and others which were more dependent on the state for assistance. However, the duration of employment, whether it was full or part time, and the quality of employment (for example in terms of salary, benefits and available hours) varied dramatically across sites and countries. For example, casual and temporary work was prominent for the investigated households in most countries sampled, reflecting the continuing shift away from permanent or long-term employment within lower-income households. It was common for participants to be in low-paid and insecure employment with variable hours and little job security.

There was a significant variation in terms of levels and duration of educational experience across the countries sampled. Greece’s sample, for example, contained a high number of university graduates. Spain’s sample, in comparison, contained only one household with a member who had a university

education. That being said, almost all participants had at least primary and secondary level education, to some level. Family size varied across all countries, ranging from couples with children, single parent households, and childless households. The majority of participants across all samples were of working age, with a very small number approaching or having just reached retirement age. Across all countries there was significant representation from migrants. Some countries, such as the UK and Greece, had almost 50/50 splits in terms of migrant and native participants, although in the UK this was due overwhelmingly to the urban sample. Finally, in some households one or more members suffered from a disability or impairment. In the UK for example, several participants suffered from mental health problems such as depression, which in many cases was related to their experiences of and difficulties with hardship. A small number experienced substance abuse issues, whilst others had experienced physical disabilities which made working difficult.

The socio-economic practices employed in times of crises and hardship have been classified into three categories. The first is related to the practices and efforts to generate and/or prevent major falls in family income. The second concerns the efforts of households to lower the quantity and/or cost of consumption (or the cost of living) in order to remain within often reduced means. The third is linked to the ways families re-arrange the use of their own assets and resources as well as those around them to survive and overcome hardship. In what follows, we discuss these three forms of socio-economic practices and then reflect on the implications of the project findings to further develop our understanding of the notion of 'resilience', its strengths and weaknesses in the light of specific findings presented in this chapter. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion.

### **<b> Literature review**

There is considerable research in Social Policy, Development Studies, Human Geography, Urban Studies that is relevant to the topic of discussion in his chapter. Perhaps, it would be useful to start with a description of socio-economic practices. Jones and Murphy offer a useful definition of socio-economic practices: 'The stabilised, routinized, or improvised social actions that constitute and reproduce economic space, and through and within which diverse actors (for example entrepreneurs, workers, caregivers, consumers, firms) and communities (for example industries, places, markets, cultural groups) organise materials, produce, consume, and/or derive meaning from the economic world' (Jones and Murphy 2011:367). While aspects of stability and routinisation are important, our interest in this study is to understand how families and individuals react to shocks and crises which imply a change rather than stability, routine and reproduction.

Studies that investigate how families respond to major instability and societal transformation are plentiful. Investigations of family coping during the Great Depression, during capitalist restructuring or transition from socialist systems are all relevant for our purposes here. Studies of socio-economic practices during transition are conceptualised in a slightly different way, partly reflecting the institutional differences among countries. Piirainen (1997), for example, studies post-socialist Russia at a time when social structure was in state of flux. He argued that households that pursued a 'market oriented' strategy emerged as the middle class, those with traditional defensive strategies (relying on

state help and informal economy) ended up as a static working class and those with 'the proletarian strategy' (relying on official state economy) formed the poverty stricken 'underclass'. Other research by Lokshin and Yemtsov (2004) looked at family strategies, after the 1998 financial crisis classified them as active (home production, supplementary work, renting rooms and so on) social network based (help from family and friends) and passive strategies (cutting spending).

For capitalist economies, a landmark contribution to the literature on socio-economic practices of families is by Elder (1974). He identifies two distinct family strategies during the Great Depression in response to change in their needs and resources: reducing expenditures and/or generating alternative/extra sources of income. Many other studies follow this categorisation with some modification. For example, Datta et al. (2007), discusses the contributions to the new economy literature, highlighting how flexibilisation and privatisation have forced people to find new ways of 'coping'. These included expenditure minimising and income maximizing strategies supplemented by reorganisation of the household (for example extension/nuclearisation) as well as use of social networks and self-provisioning.

An interesting dimension of these discussions is related to temporality of the socio-economic responses that emerge during and after the change (For more discussion on this see Dagdeviren and Donoghue 2019). Wallace (2002) also discussed post-fordist transformations (flexible employment, informality, female entry to workforce, privatisation) how they lead people to take on multiple jobs, part-time work and relying on their own resources rather than on welfare state. Similar findings are reported by Baek and Devaney (2010). Sherman (2006) finds in a rural community in the USA that subsistence food production, hunting, fishing and raising livestock and living rent free with family and friends are some of the strategies people used to deal with change.

Part of the socio-economic responses' households employ are usually conceptualised as asset (and resource) based strategies by Mingione (1987) and Rakodi (1999). This reflects the extent to which individuals or households can make better or more intensified use of their own as well as external resources in times of adversity, including income from formal or non-formal employment or self-provisioning, resources from state, family, friends and social networks.

More recent studies identify cuts made to spending as an important response by households in difficult times. In Anderson et al. (2012) the primary household strategy to cope in pressing times was to reduce spending, including on essentials such as heating and food in order to keep up with core payments. This tendency is confirmed by Hossain et al. (2011) although in their study most cutting back was from non-essential spending. Another recent study by Heflin et al. (2011) classifies households' socio-economic practices in times of major change into work-based (reported, unreported, legal, illegal), network based (help from family and friends) and agency based (help from charities) strategies. They argue that families would face hardship in multiple domains including housing, utility and food hardships.

Most studies in this literature accept that the socio-economic status of families affects the choice of strategies, as well as the perceived control over circumstances (Caplan and Schooler 2007). For example, Henly et al. (2005) explain how assistance from poor families' social networks help with coping without significantly improving their economic status because the gifts and transfers are usually small.

Table 6.1. Socio-economic practices of households

Key objectives of household practices	Major practices
Stabilising household income to prevent further falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid, unpaid, formal and informal work</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Acting on capabilities (for example going back / continuing education)</li> </ul>
Efforts to cut cost of living to contain the effects of the crisis and to protect the standard of living.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing quantity or the monetary value of consumption</li> <li>• Bargain hunting,</li> <li>• Prioritising spending</li> <li>• Self-provision</li> </ul>
Re-organising assets and resources in and around the household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from family, friends, community,</li> <li>• Running down savings,</li> <li>• Borrowing from formal/informal lenders</li> <li>• Using public/communal resources</li> </ul>

Our reading of this literature leads us to conclude that socio-economic practices of households can be discussed in different ways depending on the context, nature of shock experienced and the circumstances of the families. However, the studies reviewed above also suggest that it is possible to draw a common framework that may encompass a multitude of socio-economic practices in any context and under any circumstances. Drawing on the literature discussed above, we suggest that the key elements of this framework involve the highlights presented in Table 6.1 above.

In what follows, we utilise this framework to make sense of the socio-economic practices of resilience, emerging from our data and research.

### <b> How families try to stabilise their income

In this research, work, welfare benefits and migration to other countries for work have emerged as major routes for families to stabilise the potential falls in their income. Of these, work was found to be the most important contributor to the incomes of households, followed by social welfare in most countries included in this project. What stands out almost without exception is that non-permanent, low paid employment is sometimes more common than formal, permanent employment. Pointedly

spoken, there is a lack of decent employment across vulnerable households in all of the nine countries under investigation. Many participants in this research relied either upon insecure jobs to scrape a living or resorted to them in order to complement other sources of income. These involved a variety of arrangements (Şengül and Aytakin 2015; Capucha et al. 2015; Dagdeviren and Donoghue 2015; Wódz et al. 2015), including:

- formal but successive short-term contracts
- cash-in hand, sequential, sporadic or occasional work
- regular work with ‘zero-hours contracts’
- semi-formal work as in Poland, Turkey and Portugal, where full-time work often reported as part-time or as self-employed as a way for the employer to avoid tax and social security contributions. For example, Baluta<sup>ii</sup> was working on the basis of “green receipts” – that is, as a false independent worker – which meant that her employer not only transferred the Social Security obligations to Baluta but also made her unable to eventually claim unemployment benefit (Portugal/F/migrant/part-time worker)

Such deterioration in the conditions of employment, resulting in low and/or erratic earnings and income uncertainty, has to be ultimately harmful for resilience in the long run as insecurity obliges households to focus on their most urgent needs for the day without having any ability to plan and act to improve their conditions for the future (see chapter nine). Lack of contribution to social protection (for example social insurance) schemes in casual jobs does not only imply extension of current insecurities into old age (for example pensions) but in some cases also a lack of access to various services (for example health) in the present time.

#### **Box 6.2 Varieties of informal market activities cited in selected Case Studies<sup>iii</sup>**

*Greece:* working in bars, coffee shops and restaurants during tourism season, giving private lessons, hair dressing, cleaning and street vending.

*Poland:* Repairing or cleaning other peoples’ houses, making and selling handicrafts (for example crochets, dolls, flowers) at local markets or through the internet.

*Turkey:* working as unregistered shop keeper, scrap paper collector, betting agent, porter,

*Finland:* Gathering and selling wild berries, marketing items (for example Tupperware, stamps), taking on odd jobs (for example sport referee in local games), making and selling handmade garments, collecting recycled goods and selling at flea markets.

*The UK:* painting neighbour’s houses, working in bars, distributing leaflets or magazines, construction work, cooking or waiting in restaurants.

Moreover, participants applied for jobs they were overqualified for as exemplified by cases from Greece, Portugal and the UK. Some tried further education and re-training as a way to improve their

chances of employment, but this aspiration remained unrealised in all cases because of the decline in labour market opportunities. In some cases, young people seem to be taking early exit from education in order to work and contribute to the family budget.

Ups and downs in the economy also affected the fortunes of micro and small businesses.

'We started as textile workers and we met in a textile workshop and got married. Then we decided to open our own workshop. We've had so many up and downs. When the economy was doing well we made some savings and then when the textile sector got into crisis [twice - in 2001 and 2009] we lost our savings. We closed our workshop a couple of times and put our machines in a storage to wait for the right times.' (Turkey/ F/40s)

This is clearly a story of resilience but one that is defeated for periods of time by wider economic forces. To improve their living conditions, the couple showed an entrepreneurial spirit, used their acquired knowledge and skills in the textile sector, took some risks in order to transform their lives by becoming self-employed and employer of others. The downturns in the market, that were beyond their control, counteracted against their initiatives and led to the closure of their workshop and loss of savings.

State transfers have been an important barrier against poverty and destitution across the EU. These were the second most important source of income and of social resilience for our participants, protecting them when they are unemployed or employed, but on low incomes. In-work benefits (compensating low wages or part-time/temporary work) as well as child benefits have been important in supporting working participants. Quite often households combined wages from formal or informal employment with welfare benefits, help from family members with pension and assistance from charities.

The comparative strengths of the welfare state, its history of development and evolution of citizens' rights and entitlements (cf. Esping-Andersen 1990) has made a significant difference to vulnerable households' socioeconomic position and social resilience in individual countries. In this respect, Finland, Germany, the UK and Ireland, despite variation amongst them, clearly provided a better safety net in terms of value and/or coverage with various forms of welfare support, particularly in comparison with the more traditionally residual or developing welfare systems (for example Turkey, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Poland). The degrees of exposure to the recent financial crisis and the associated policy changes have also impacted welfare protection and therefore the foundations of social resilience. Austerity implied significant cuts, and in some cases, complete abandonment of various social protection payments. In Greece, these cuts were more severe as part of the conditionality imposed on the country by the lenders. 'Welfare support is limited since the structural adjustment programs have abolished most family benefits, as well as tax exemptions for children. The

only benefits that still exist are those given to families with more than two children.’ (Kambouri et al. 2015:18).

Reverse migration from urban to rural areas in Greece raised the chances of migrants for employment in addition to helping them to lower the cost of living due to lower housing and food costs (Kambouri et al. 2015). Findings in Lapland provide examples of both reverse migration and short-term international migration – in particular to Norway, during periods when work in reindeer farms is relatively light (Vuojala-Magga et al. 2015).

### **<b> Family endeavours to lower the cost of living**

Going without was a prominent theme in the narratives of participants in all case study countries, reflecting the material deprivations of families. Some of the sacrifices were from non-essential goods and services while others were from essential consumption goods, threatening the health and survival of participants. The choice they made between these, as well as the severity of deprivations, signified the degree of hardship they lived in, on a spectrum ranging from getting by to destitution.

Cutting down from essential consumption often involved energy, food and medical necessities. Switching off heating for a period of time, using public spaces such as libraries (for example for doing homework), going to bed early to save heating costs, were common. Some participants in the UK, Ireland, Poland and Spain admitted limiting the number of meals or reducing expensive food items such as meat from the diet. In Greece, Poland and Germany some participants reported delaying or giving up some of the medical expenses that they needed such as medicines, eyeglasses and dental treatment.

The most frequently talked about ‘non-essential’ expenses families tried to avoid or reduce were those for holidays and leisure activities, including those for children (for example school camps). Public spaces and resources such as walks and games in nearby woodlands were used as a substitute for paid-for holidays in Spain, Ireland and Poland. Treats for children, gifts for birthdays and special occasions, clothing were all strictly rationed as an attempt to reduce the cost of living as reflected by a participant in Lapland. ‘Money is used for good quality of regular food with fresh vegetables, but the consumption of treats and refreshments is limited and controlled’ (Finland/mother/agricultural education). Economising by cutting down on smoking, newspapers, internet, phone bills, going out to eat, drinking or other leisure activities also featured often in the conversations of the participants.

While housing costs may have declined after the crisis in some countries, in others such as the UK there has been a crisis of affordable housing. Lack of investment and decline in social housing stock constituted an important source of insecurity for low income groups in some EU countries.

Reconfiguration of living space was used frequently. In Greece, Finland, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Ireland and Turkey, remaining with or returning to the family home was the most viable option for some participants. This meant different things for different people. In some instances, participants complained about lack of autonomy or reduced autonomy as a result of having to live with parents or other members of the family, not out of choice but out of necessity. In other instances, younger participants complained about not being able to 'move on' with their lives or to enter into relationships and build a family for themselves because of the duty towards older family members, especially towards parents, and continued to live with them in order to share their cost of living.

Bargain hunting occupied many low-income households within urban locations. Transport and distance prevented some families from engaging in similar activities in the rural locations. While some families chose to do their food shopping daily in order to catch the best offers, others explained how visiting shops often led them to spend more than they intended. Hence, they filled up the freezer to reduce the need for going to shops to buy bare essentials such as bread and milk as a way to deal with this problem (Ireland, UK). Buying lower quality products and out-of-date food were mentioned as a way to reduce outgoings. Use of second hand markets, charity shops and flea markets for clothing, furniture and other household items was common.

Self-provision or producing goods and services for one's own consumption was also prominent in the narratives of participants as a way to reduce the monetary cost of living and better cope with hardship. For example, in Ireland some participants grew vegetables for their own consumption - potatoes, onions, cabbage, carrots and turnips, sometimes producing a surplus that could be given to friends and neighbours (Dagg and Gray 2015). Fishing, hunting and gathering wild fruits and mushrooms in Finland (Vuolaa-Magga et al. 2015) and to some extent in Germany (Meier et al. 2015; Promberger 2017) and the collection of firewood from the forest in Spain (Arnal et al. 2015) as a substitute for costly fuel, were some of the examples reported. Fixing and maintaining own machinery, mending own cars, doing the carpentry for one's own furniture were also mentioned (see chapter seven).

Strict budgeting and stocking up for future consumption was a way of exerting some control over spending. In Spain, for example, rents constituted a large proportion of incomes, especially for those on welfare benefits, and were given priority. Then households had to decide what expense *not* to pay. It may be part of the rent or the electricity or gas bill (Arnal et al. 2015). Some talked about strictly planning the cooked meals in order to serve them more than once. In Poland, a woman explained how she apportioned chicken into parts to cook and serve for several meals (Wódz et al. 2015). In Lapland, food for winter is stocked through net fishing and hunting in autumn and preserving the catch by freezing. Some of these activities are carried out in groups and the caught, hunted and gathered goods are shared between the households (Vuojala-Magga et al. 2015).

A final theme that runs through the findings is the role played by informal exchange that may take the form of personal or social exchange, including gift giving, some involving reciprocity others solidarity or a personal or social duty towards others (see chapter two and seven). In Germany, there were

examples of sharing cars, tools and magazine subscriptions, doing repairs for each other, giving or taking home made jams, juice or liquor, home grown herbs, fruits and vegetables (Meier et al. 2015). In Lapland, reindeer herders exchanged the work of maintaining fences and watching animals to guard against predators in the wilderness. These services may be paid for in fuel or by a gift of reindeer, fish or meat (Vuojala-Magga et al. 2015).

Family support played a significant role in sustaining individuals and households through hardship across all countries but perhaps more so in some than others. In Greece, the older members in receipt of pensions shared their already reduced and limited earnings (Kambouri et al. 2015). In Turkey, farming households sent foodstuff such as fruits, vegetables, pulses, cracked wheat and so on to their children and relatives who had migrated and settled down in urban locations (Şengül and Aytekin 2015). In Spain, families helped by lending money for unforeseen payments, preparing food for all, or buying some clothes, school supplies or paying debts when it is very difficult to do so (Arnal et al. 2015).

### **<b> Importance of assets, use of debt, common and public resources**

Most participants in the nine countries covered in this study did not own many physical assets, except for houses, often with a mortgage. Participants in the UK were least likely to own their homes while those in Finland, Poland and Turkey were more likely. Most participants did not have savings. In some cases, participants, particularly from the UK and Portugal, reported selling personal possessions to raise funds, such as watches, wedding rings and furniture.

Perhaps the most important factor when looking at the use of assets and resources is participants' relationship with debt. This is to some extent linked to the centrality of debt, both sovereign and household, to the financial crisis. This was especially the case in the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey and Greece but not so common in Germany, Poland and Finland. A participant in Greece found that during the country's sovereign debt crisis, her employer could not pay her salary, which forced her to begin spending on credit cards in order to pay for essentials in her day-to-day life (Kambouri et al. 2015). This is especially notable in the UK where for many credit cards and overdraft facilities have become the norm in managing daily spending and other essential outgoings. In Poland, debt was used in an arguably more traditional way, to build assets and resources rather than to finance consumption (essential or otherwise). In Turkey, the striking difference is illustrated by one participant, who remarked:

‘You cannot show me one single family who are not in debt. The only difference is that some of us have big amount of debt to banks while some others' debt is not that

big. We do not know how to pay it. Only we get further debt to pay the debt. The only relief is that we are all in debt [laughs].’ (Turkey/male/40s)

Thus far, the analyses of household practices in this chapter have predominantly focused on private, traded and commodified resources. However, across the entire RESCuE sample use of public resources proved particularly important. In Portugal, vacant land in both urban and rural locations was used to grow vegetables and raise small livestock such as chickens and rabbits, which could then be used for food, and shared amongst multiple households (Capucha et al. 2015). In Lapland, public resources such as free healthcare, library services, affordable and accessible sports facilities and evening courses were seen as crucial for wellbeing. After attending a community college course, one participant even built his own boat, whilst another was able to start making their own clothes (Vuojala-Magga 2015: 18; see chapter two). There are many similarities in the UK case, where local authorities provide libraries, children’s centres, leisure centres, playgrounds and in some locations city farms – although austerity measures in the country have put some at risk.

Support by third sector organisations such as charities, churches and solidarity groups played a stronger role in some countries than others. In the UK, over one million individuals have been receiving food parcels every year from foodbanks after 2008 (Trussell Trust 2016)<sup>iv</sup> which in our view reflected temporary spells of destitution for a significant proportion of the population. In Greece, assistance by the solidarity movements that have emerged since the economic crisis began is more prominent (Kambouri et al. 2015). In Finland, food delivery by the church or the organizations for the unemployed is found to be popular among nearly all the informants (Vuojala-Magga 2015:18). In Turkey, clientelist networks play a functional role for all involved, including charity in return for loyalty and voluntary work, they also create animosity (Şengül and Aytekin 2015). There is evidence of using foodbanks in all of the nine countries covered in this study.

### **<b> Implications for resilience**

A major attraction of resilience in much of the literature is the emphasis on the potential individual agency of those facing hardship, contradicting the ‘deficit approach’ associated with established poverty studies that tend, argue many proponents of resilience, towards viewing people in poverty as passive victims of circumstance (for example Royce 2009:64; Lister 2002; Mullin and Arce 2008; Buckner et al. 2003). This emphasises the importance of individuals’ and households’ socio-economic decision making. Central to resilience is a focus on how individuals and groups, in times of adversity, are able to turn crises into opportunities whilst surviving many different pressures. However, these positive accounts, based upon individual agency, do not take into account social conditions, including class, gender, ethnicity, power relations, cultural norms, (post-) colonial influences, and so on (Dagdeviren et al. 2016:6; Chandler 2013; Duffield 2012). It is these social conditions that define the boundaries of the possible in terms of the choices that can be made. For example, getting a second job to complement existing income is only possible if the labour market is buoyant enough to sustain it. Where this may have been possible, it may have come at the risk of inferior employment conditions with lower wages and precarious work.

Across the countries covered in this study, there were many examples of practices that encapsulate the ethos of resilience – beating the odds (Seccombe 2002). Families supported each other, made effective use of budgeting, employed bargain hunting, made use of open or free access public resources in their quest to deal with austerity and hardship. In Germany, there was one participant who was able to maintain an old camper trailer allowing their family to go on holiday cheaply, or another who taught her children how to grow food, the result can be not only an improved economic situation but also increased confidence and self-esteem that will allow them to strive for improved quality of life (Meier et al. 2015:25-26). As the latter participant remarked:

‘[My children can] look around if they are poor and on the margin and that they look back and remember what you can do from plants and from herbs. That they can shift for themselves... What you can do from apples, that you can produce apple jelly. Then you have to buckle down to work.’ (Germany/ mother of more than 3 children/rural area)

Likewise, a number of Polish participants demonstrated a creativity that enabled them to take hobbies and talents and transform them into income-generating activities (see chapter seven). ‘Some of the respondents improved their situation through painting pictures or playing on the accordion’ (Poland/F/rural area)), ‘making decorations made of tissue paper’ (Poland/F/taking care of mother and 2 disabled sons), ‘having their own music band’ (PI/husband/urban area). Further education and /or retraining reflect vocational and spatial mobility and these could also be seen within a positive light.

The socio-economic practices of resilience employed by participants across all the RESCuE countries were dominated by cost-cutting practices. For example, efforts to contain cost of living by significantly cutting down from food, energy and health costs were widespread across the countries covered in this study. The fact that these result in deprivations of basic but essential needs clearly show that the resilience paradigm may gloss over the negative consequences of household action in times of hardship. Many participants found it difficult to plan any further ahead than the immediate future, posing problems for the development of resilience, which requires a long-term view that will guide the appropriate use and acquisition of resources.

Some of the findings suggest complex relationships between survival and coping with hardship and the socio-economic characteristics of households. Working class or low-income participants, who had long-term experience of coping with poverty and hardship, fared better than ‘the new poor’ or formerly middle-class households in terms of coping and getting by. On the other hand, the middle class households that were hit hard by the crisis seem to have access to a set of resources such as savings, house, and social connections that enables a speedier transition to a better economic state. Labour mobility is an important means for coping with hardship but achieving decent living conditions

may be difficult, especially for international migrants, as a result of the multiple disadvantages they face in the host countries.

Moreover, the resilience approach has the potential to problematize structural issues in terms of individual pathologies. For example, willingness of participants' to accept jobs for which they are overqualified or jobs that offer low and erratic pay and uncertainty may be viewed as resilience but this hides the lack of choice and opportunities for better employment conditions and insecurity associated with non-standard employment conditions in the labour market. Lack of good opportunities is well reflected by the fact some people resort to practices that keep them afloat financially and socially but are not entirely legal, such as a UK participant who helped maintain roads "off the books".

Widening inequality in advanced capitalist societies since the 1980s is well known (Atkinson et al. 2011; Stockhammer 2015). The richest 1 percent owned around half of global wealth in 2014 (Hardoon 2015). This is reflected in our study of low-income groups who lacked the assets and resources to fall back on when hit by a major personal or socio-economic crisis. Unemployment, low wages and insecure employment conditions implied that most participants had no savings to use against unexpected developments in their life. Difficulties of getting on the housing ladder, limited social housing and high rents in the private sector translated into a housing crisis for many people in countries such as the UK where housing costs contributes to a rise in poverty by one-third (DWP 2013). The implications of all this is that if we want families to cope with crises better then they must earn sufficiently well to build their homes and savings to counter the negative shocks in their life.

In addition to better employment conditions, social protection and welfare systems are the best barriers against hardship in times of crisis. Such an approach encapsulates the idea that resilience is primarily a product of individual agency, whilst acknowledging the conditioning factors of socio-economic structure, the supporting capacities of civil society and community organisations. Additionally, these factors require support through structural assistance – whether that is through direct transfers such as the welfare state, qualifications and skills provision through education, the development, maintenance and protection of good health, or providing adequate housing fit for purpose. Effective social security and welfare systems would enable households to weather suffering without needing to be preoccupied with the essential concerns of everyday survival.

Finally, the findings in this chapter show that open access or free public resources such as parks, libraries, child centres, leisure centres, health services, social and training clubs enhance the quality of life for the most vulnerable population and directly or indirectly support resilience.

## **<b> Conclusion**

A striking convergence of socio-economic practices exists across Europe. In all cases, cutting down what are considered to be expendable elements of consumption, such as treats or spending for celebrations and holidays, surfaces as one of the primary means by which households try to exert some control over their budget. Those who face more severe hardship cut down on vital items, such as reducing the number of meals, protein rich food like meat which may be expensive, not putting on heating and foregoing medical treatment. These are clearly measures of deprivation and describing them as a strategy of resilience or coping with hardship would be to glamorise them.

The country level studies contain a wealth of evidence about how people in hardship try to manage their limited resources. These include changes in how they shop, for example cycles of shopping or a search for bargains, and where they shop for example discount stores, second hand shops, across the borders, as well as greater recycling of used materials. Do-it-yourself and grow-it-yourself emerge as an important practice for own consumption to prevent further potential falls in the standard of living although this is more common in some countries than others. Payment of bills is another area that requires careful consideration by households. Rent and utility bills frequently receive priority in the allocation of family budgets.

If degrees of resilience are classified into survival, coping, getting by and transcending hardship, a large proportion of the practices for dealing with hardship recorded in this research falls into coping and getting by and very few could be regarded as overcoming hardship. Not all socio-economic practices of coping with hardship produce positive results other than coping with hardship. Many lead to negative consequences, reflected by a range of deprivations and insecurity.

From a policy perspective, there are a number of facilitators that would enhance social resilience. First, improvements in labour market conditions, including the level of pay and security, are the most important means through which resilience against negative shocks and hardship can be built. It would enable people to save and invest against potential adversities. However, our findings show that informal, casual, short-term, irregular work is common in all countries, reflecting the precarious conditions of employment. This is likely to restrict the general resilience of working classes, which traditionally consisted of decent and sustainable jobs. Savings are important for meeting unexpected expenditures families have to make. However, the ability to save was limited amongst participants, particularly low-income earners rendering them more susceptible to crises. Instead, there is greater use of debt and signs of over-indebtedness, more in some countries, such as the UK and Ireland, than in others.

Secondly, unemployment and ill health is sometimes inevitable and when this happens, welfare and social security systems are still the most significant barrier against more severe forms of poverty and act as the most important vehicle for developing or maintaining socio-economic resilience. Third, open access or free public resources such as libraries, health centres, children centres, advice and advocacy units, and public spaces remarkably enhance aspects of people's lives even if they are facing hardship in other areas.

At a more individual level, family in a broad sense emerges as one of the most important supporting units during difficult times, including help with housing, food, small loans and childcare. While duty and solidarity appear as the overriding motives in this, the findings also reflect the burden this creates for the family members who are at the giving end (Gray and Dagg 2019, see chapter nine). Participants also benefit from other forms of social and informal exchange involving reciprocity, solidarity and gift-giving, for example, amongst friends, neighbours, community organisations, faith-based or ethnicity-based institutions and political groups (see chapter seven).

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<sup>i</sup> We acknowledge the problems associated with the term household but use it to cover units involving co-habitation as well as families.

<sup>ii</sup> All names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

<sup>iii</sup> While these emerged as key informal activities in household interviews, note that these activities can also involve formal work.

<sup>iv</sup> The actual numbers are likely to be much greater taking into account that those who collect food parcels for their family not as an individual, those who use foodbanks and charities not belonging to Trussell Trust and those who do not use foodbanks to avoid the stigma and shame despite needing food support.