

Summary on resilient socio-economic practices

The RESCuE teams have recently put together a series of national reports concerned with households' socio-economic practices of resilience, within the context of crisis and hardship.

Each country used purposive sampling methods in order to select an appropriate range of households to take part in a series of interviews, with some further taking part in photo elicitation. These were designed to illustrate some of the key narratives of hardship articulated by households and to show a number of the socio-economic practices of resilience used across Europe. Each country provided a varied sample for the research, containing single person households, single parent households, couples and couples with children. There was also a good representation of both male and female participants. In total, the RESCuE partners undertook at least 12 interviews in urban and rural areas, with a further 8 photographic interviews in each site (providing a total of 360 interviews across all 9 countries).

Interviews were semi-structured, ensuring that central topics were covered but providing enough flexibility for the participants to articulate subjects they felt were important. This also enabled the researchers to ask further questions appropriate to the conversation. This has provided an impressive amount of data for each country to work with, and would not have been possible with a larger sample size. The data relating to socio-economic practices was, in general, subjected to a thematic analysis by the country teams. This is also the main approach used in the international report.

A number of key themes across the partner institution countries are identified. Regarding narratives of hardship, participants across Europe discussed experiences of deprivation, articulated in the main as a difficulty or inability to meet basic needs, such as providing food for themselves or their families and paying bills. This fed into the second major narrative concerned with feelings of insecurity and unsustainability, particularly regarding employment, financial stability and emotional resilience. Finally, participants narrated their experiences of deprivation and insecurity as having a significant impact on planning their future, with the majority feeling compelled to adopt a short-term approach to their personal and financial well-being.

Nevertheless, the national reports demonstrated that there is significant convergence in terms of the strategies used for coping with crisis and hardship. In general, these practices fall under three main strategies:

- utilising available resources such as community resources, natural resources or resources provided by local and national government.
- developing strategies to alter household consumption to bring it down to more manageable levels, such as reducing the cost of food, bills, heating and so on.

- Focusing on means of increasing household income, through formal and informal employment

The research findings provided in the Country Reports provide plenty of examples of survival and coping amongst the participant households, but very few cases of transcending to a better state of living. They also demonstrate the physical, mental and emotional toll it takes to be resilient in the face of hardship. This is particularly true for those households that previously led a comfortable existence, but have since experienced a sharp loss in resources and assets.

The report highlights a number of problematic aspects of the term 'resilience' in addition to those raised in Dagdeviren et al. (2015). It raises the questions as to whether resilience is reflected by the outcomes achieved or efforts put in to overcome adversity. Is it the individuals or the strategies they are engaged with in overcoming adversity that should be the subject of classification for resilience and non-resilience?

It is pointed out that to the extent that the coping strategies result in deprivations of essential consumption goods and services such as food and medical care, the physical health consequences can be significant. Hence, discussing these practices as a form of resilience would be glamorising these distressing results. The findings also suggest that socio-economic practices of resilience are found to be related to factors such as previous experience of hardship, class, age and ethnic status of households.