

## Summer school - Call for applications

# TOWARDS A SOCIAL EUROPE: THE BIRTH OF THE PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

University of Bologna  
Department of Sociology and Business Law  
Forlì Campus | 23-26 June 2026

### INTRODUCTION

In November 2017, at the Gothenburg Social Summit, the European Union took a significant step toward the idea of being a "Social Europe" with the adoption of the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**. Although the EU's social roots were not ignored by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, they were not explicitly recognised as a fundamental drive of European integration, at least until the Delors Commission in the late 1980s. The "long and winding road" of social policy has been hindered by years of neoliberal dominance and lack of political agreement until 2017, and the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic gave new prominence to the social agenda. The introduction of the NextGenerationEU recovery package marked a significant turning point. Indeed, by enabling shared debt issuance and prioritising investments in social resilience, it signalled a decisive shift away from the austerity-driven policies of the past and toward a more integrated and socially cohesive Europe. The launch of the EPSR Action Plan in Porto in 2021 - recalled in von der Leyen's political guidelines for the 2024-2029 Commission - gives continuity to this perspective.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Against this backdrop, the **Jean Monnet Module TOPs – Toward Ten Years of the European Pillar of Social Rights** organises a summer programme aiming at fostering a critical, international, and interdisciplinary discussion on the history of Social Europe and on the (in)direct role of the European Union, particularly the EPSR, in shaping national social legislation and action.



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**The summer school is addressed to early-career scholars** (PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, etc.) and practitioners with a background in social sciences (sociology, history, political science, economy, law, ...).

The TOPs' summer school is embedded in the activities of CRIDS / IRCSR (Centro di Ricerca Interdisciplinare sui Diritti Sociali - Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Social Rights), which is built on a longstanding and interdisciplinary commitment to academic exchange, also for early-career researchers - a perspective that the summer school aims to pursue, combining social sciences and law approaches to the analysis of the history of European social policy. Through lectures, discussions, and interactive sessions, TOPs seeks to provide participants with both analytical tools and critical insights to engage in the evolution of the European social dimension and its impact on member states' welfare legislation.

## SUMMER SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The 2026 edition of the TOPs' summer school will take place at the **University of Bologna, Forlì Campus, from 23 to 26 June 2026**, and will consist of 30 hours of lectures, seminars, and interactive discussions among participants through working labs. In order to ensure a high-level academic environment, the summer school will host internationally recognised scholars and guest lecturers, who will contribute through keynote lectures and dedicated sessions to foster critical debate and interdisciplinary exchange.

The summer school programme aims to promote a deeper understanding of the path related to the development of Social Europe and the EPSR, as well as their implications for Member States.

Before the start of the summer school, an **online 8-hour crash course** will be offered with the goal of aligning participants' legal, sociological, and broader social science backgrounds. The crash course is strongly recommended, as it is designed to provide all participants with a shared set of theoretical and methodological foundations, thereby facilitating more effective engagement with the lectures, discussions, and collaborative activities during the summer school.

## HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The summer school will host a maximum of 20 participants.

Participants will be selected based on a curriculum vitae, including relevant educational and professional experiences, selected publications, and a cover letter of up to 300 words.

These documents **must be submitted by email to [sde.topseunibo.it](mailto:sde.topseunibo.it) by 31 March 2026**. Applicants will be informed of the selection outcome at the email address from which they submitted their application by 15 April 2026, and must confirm their participation by 25 April 2026.

The summer school is free of charge, and meals will be provided by the organisers.

## CONTACTS AND INFORMATION

For further information:  
[sde.topseunibo.it](mailto:sde.topseunibo.it)

Check the website for updates  
<https://site.unibo.it/tops/en>

