# Summary of the WelfareExperiences project

**What makes one social protection system better than another system?**

(‘Social protection’ is another way of saying ‘welfare’ or ‘benefits’).

To date, most research has looked at whether these systems reduce poverty and encourage people to work. These are important, but from speaking to claimants, we know that other things matter too – whether benefits provide dignity, security and feel fair; or whether people feel stigmatised, insecure, and unjustly treated.

Through a comparison of five countries (Estonia, Hungary, Norway, Spain and the UK), we will provide one of the first international comparisons of ‘claimant experiences’ such as dignity, security and justice. This will also help us to understand how these experiences effect mental health and work, and how policies influence these experiences. Together, these help advance academic knowledge, and also contribute to making claimant experiences better in these countries and beyond.

We have four objectives:

1. To think about what ‘claimant experiences’ are – or put another way, which aspects of claimants’ experiences really matter to them;

2. To compare claimant experiences across the Estonia, Hungary, Norway, Spain and the UK;

3. To understand how different policies can make claimant experiences better/worse;

4. To understand how claimant experiences can affect people’s mental health and whether or not they move into work.

To achieve this, we have three strands of work.

Firstly, we will bring a group of people together to think about what ‘claimant experiences’ are. This includes not just academics but also people with lived experiences of claiming benefits in each country.

Secondly, we will quantitatively measure and compare experiences across countries. There are two parts to this:

(i) A phone survey of 1,000 people. This is resource-intensive, but is the only way of making sure we speak to people that struggle to do things online, and therefore the only way of comparing countries reliably;

(ii) An online survey of 5,000 people – because this is cheaper, we can speak to more people, allowing us look at the differences between claimants within each country. It also allows us to follow people over time, to see how things that happen to them affect their experiences, and how their experiences affect their mental health and decision to work.

Third, we will qualitatively look in-depth at claimant experiences. This will start with traditional in-depth interviews, but then use more innovative ways to follow people over time:

(i) an online app where people log every time they speak to someone about their claim (whether in person, online, by phone or by letter). For people that struggle to do things online, we will create an alternative approach that works for them.

(ii) quick interviews by phone as soon as possible after key moments in people’s claim (which we will be able to see from the online app).

=> By doing this across five countries, we are able to look at how claimant experiences are affected by particular conversations or messages as part of their claim, and how this is affected by e.g. wider levels of trust that people have in different systems.

Crucially, we will do this research in partnership with claimants themselves – partly because our work will be better and better-trusted if it draws on claimants’ expertise; but mostly because this is the way that we ourselves think research like this should be done.

*Note: this is the summary of the project as it was submitted to the European Research Council – the actual project will change in delivery to make best use of the funds to meet these aims. Please see the project website for more information.*

*Ben Geiger, 29/1/2023 [this note added 24/3/2025]*