

## International Success Stories - [Silvia Naydenova](#)

<b>Project Title</b>	EUTOPIA Co-Tutelle Funded/ Benchmarking and social inclusion in CEE states: the implications of EU-funded activation projects
<b>What were your main reasons for applying for the Co-Tutelle programme?</b>	I was advised to apply by my supervisor with whom I was talking to before I applied to the University of Warwick.
<b>Brief description of project</b>	My project focuses on Central and Eastern Europe and the implication of the European Union's benchmarking for social inclusion. I am investigating how EU membership has helped CEE states to transform and what has this transformation entailed for them in terms of increasing active labour market policies. The aim of these policies is social inclusion, as promoted by the Union, however I aim to interrogate the local implications of activation projects and whether they deliver effective alleviation of social inequalities. To demonstrate this I interview participants in an EU-funded project targeting women's return to the labour market after maternity leave.
<b>What challenges/questions is your research trying to answer?</b>	My research critically explores the European Union's social policy governance, with a focus on the subjective experiences of activation project beneficiaries. I aim to address whether these governance mechanisms effectively tackle the persistent systemic inequalities in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region.
<b>What have been your key findings and subsequent impact to date?</b>	<p>My document analysis and interviews have proven incredibly valuable. During the initial stages of document analysis, I discovered intriguing discursive framings and narratives used by the European Union to promote specific social policies. I also noticed how these policies developed alongside benchmarks. Furthermore, I identified findings not previously seen in the literature, particularly regarding the EU's benchmarking mechanisms.</p> <p>My interviews with Bulgarian officials were instrumental. They revealed a lack of feedback loop regarding the effectiveness of social policy to the European Union. Additionally, in-depth interviews with mothers participating in an EU-funded project highlighted significant insecurity resulting from their participation. This insight suggests a substantial disconnect between EU social policy governance and funding opportunities, and the local implications for beneficiaries.</p>
<b>Intended next steps</b>	I plan to either pursue a career in academia through post-doctoral programs or research positions, or focus on public work with NGOs or institutions related to my research focus. Additionally, I aim to publish my thesis as a book and continue writing and publishing.