

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE DEMANDS OF SOLIDARITY

Defending the welfare state in hard times

Frank Vandenbroucke

In: *Journal of European Social Policy*

ABSTRACT

Welfare states are under pressure: defence spending adds to budgetary pressures confronting many European governments, whilst new social and health-related challenges require reform. I return to fundamental questions that shaped social policy over the last 40 years, notably the issue of 'personal responsibility' versus 'solidarity' and 'moral hazard' as a limit to the organisation of solidarity. I highlight long-term trends and swings in the ideational debate on solidarity, responsibility and moral hazard. I argue that, from a normative point of view, welfare state solidarity is inherently a responsibility-sensitive concept. I distinguish four connotations of responsibility, which I see as 'demands of solidarity'. An adequate conception of solidarity that answers the challenges of contemporary welfare states and allows a robust defence of welfare state solidarity cannot shy away from questions of personal responsibility, but it should include all the demands of responsibility – of which personal responsibility is only one. The paper is based on the 2025 Sidney Ball Lecture organised by the Department of Social Policy and Intervention of the University of Oxford.

KEYWORDS

Solidarity; responsibility; moral hazard; egalitarianism; activation

Published by *Journal of European Social Policy*, 9 October 2026

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/09589287261497038>

DOI: 10.1177/09589287261497038