

COFFERS: the next three years of my research

Published: January 14, 2026, 10:40 am

Every now and again I have to provide new information on my sources of funding as these change over time. Another change is now imminent.

As some readers of this blog will be aware, I was appointed as [Professor of Practice in International Political Economy](#) at City University, London last September. This was a one day a week post where I mixed some teaching with the aim of helping raise the university new research funding.

I am pleased to say that this second goal has been achieved. City will be from 1 November this year a part of an EU funded Horizon 2020 project that has been given the name COFFERS (Combating Financial Fraud and Empowering Regulators). A summary of the COFFERS project is as follows:

Since 2008 'fiscal leaks' have become an immediate policy challenge for EU governments, partly as a result of tax abuse. The COFFERS project unfolds as EU tax authorities transition to a new era in tackling tax abuse based upon policy innovation at the OECD, EU and national levels.

COFFERS recognizes this creates a state of flux where much tax authority expertise regarding past regulations, systems and practices is now irrelevant and understanding has, instead, to focus upon the on-going change process. Deploying principles of evolutionary political economy COFFERS both studies and is an integral part of this change process.

COFFERS recognizes that identifying and tackling the tax gap to relieve inequality is the ultimate aim. Noting the tax gap exists both domestically and internationally and ranges from criminal money laundering to sophisticated tax avoidance, COFFERS benchmarks current understanding of these issues, undertakes comparative analysis of approaches taken to tackle them across EU Member States, and assesses resources being allocated to the task of closing the tax gap.

In parallel expert networks in business, the tax profession, secrecy jurisdictions and the criminal economy that develop the mechanisms undermining the expected

effectiveness of tax systems will be appraised, especially with regard to responses to regulatory changes taking place.

This results in COFFERS outputs that transmit analysis, risk assessment and policy advice. Deliverables of use to EU tax authorities include new tax gap analyses by state, tax risk maps identifying risk by jurisdiction, a new anatomy of money laundering risk, and tools to help tax authorities understand the risks that they face domestically and internationally.

COFFERS delivers value for money in enhancing tax yield, effectiveness in creating the tools to achieve that goal, and behavioral change in taxpayers and their advisers as a result of recommendations made, all with the aim of reducing inequality.

Start date: 1st of November 2016. Granted amount from the H2020 program for the 3 year project is €4.986.989

Project coordinator: University of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

This is a multi-university project. I will from 1 November be working on this for half my time, paid by City. It will not involve me in any new teaching obligations.

If, as we expect, another EU funded project is approved shortly then I will be working full time at City from that date: I will provide more information on this project when the paperwork is all concluded. Whatever happens I will find my self predominantly engaged in an employment for the first time in 32 years.

I admit to being excited at the prospect. When I left university I had a career plan (which is, I know, a little sad) which was to be a practitioner for twenty years followed by a career as an academic. The first bit went almost exactly to plan, but the last fifteen years or so have seen me work as a campaigner instead of being an academic. I don't regret that: I have enjoyed that activity and have no intention of giving up a vocal role. But the chance to work in a new and challenging environment that I had always hoped to be a part of, working on issues like the tax gap that I am passionate about, is one that is too good to miss. I am grateful for the chance to do it.

That said, I offer my grateful thanks to current and past funders, many of whom have helped lay the groundwork on the issues I and colleagues in a number of countries will now be addressing. I am truly grateful for the opportunities they gave me to put many of the issues COFFERS will look at into the public arena.

I am expecting to carry on blogging, probably until I drop. And since my father's just turned 90 I am hoping that is some way off as yet.