

CALL FOR A RESEARCH ASSISTANT IN BOLOGNA

The University of Bologna, Department of Economics, invites applications for the position of Research Assistant at the pre-doctoral, doctoral or post-doctoral level in the field of experimental and social science.

The researcher's primary focus will be on studying *social norms and their dynamics* in situations characterized by risk and uncertainty, such as climate change, pandemics and natural disasters. Questions of interest are how do norms develop in uncertain situations such as after climate disasters? When and how can norms be strengthened to promote cooperative and sustainable behavior?

RESPONSIBILITIES

Key responsibilities include:

- Designing and conducting large-scale online experiments and surveys.
- Coordinating development with software developers.
- Analyzing data and preparing research results for both scientific publications and broader audience outlets.

RESEARCH PROJECT ABSTRACT

Human activities have significantly impacted Earth's climate and ecosystems, with the potential to induce irreversible changes that could prove catastrophic for the well-being of species on our planet. Addressing these global threats necessitates collective behavioral changes, where each individual's action holds the power to make a difference. This involves resolving a collective risk dilemma: individuals should make efforts not solely for personal gain but to avert a collective loss. Generally, people are reluctant to individually bear this cost, often relying on others' investments.

The key question is: How can individuals be motivated to cooperate individually to mitigate the risk of a collective loss? This research project, titled "DYNOSOR: DYNamics of SOcial NORms under collective Risk" posits that social norms play a crucial role. These norms motivate people to undertake actions that are individually costly but socially beneficial. Unlike past studies that analyzed social norms at a specific point in time, DYNOSOR recognizes the dynamic dimensions of norms and their feedback with risk and behavior. This acknowledgment addresses a major knowledge gap, particularly critical now, as dealing with collective risk problems requires fostering enduring cooperation among individuals, rather than one-shot efforts. Interestingly, recent evidence suggests that while norms enhance cooperation under risk, they lose strength as risk decreases, leading to a decline in cooperation.

DYNOSOR advances by testing two novel hypotheses. The first posits a feedback cycle between norms, risk, and behavior, making norms less effective. While this cycle may be inevitable, the second hypothesis conjectures the existence of regimes, referred to as sweet spots, within which norms remain sufficiently stable over time yet flexible enough to change for effective solutions to collective action problems. Identifying the conditions under which sweet spots for social norms

can be reached and maintained allows us to pinpoint when social norms prove effective in addressing collective risks.

DYNOSOR has two primary objectives. The first is to develop a unified, empirically validated theory on the dynamics of social norms, explaining how they emerge, spread, and change under collective risks and identifying the conditions under which they can promote a solution. The second objective is to understand how norms can be strengthened to become more effective solutions. These objectives will be pursued through an innovative multi-method, cross-disciplinary approach integrating theoretical insights from social psychology, sociology, economics, cognitive science, and employing experimental and computational methods. This approach will produce transformative evidence challenging commonly held, simplistic conceptions of social norms as static and predominantly beneficial. The insights generated will offer an innovative method for social norms diagnosis and interventions, appreciated among academic experts, policymakers, and the general audience.