

Junior Research Group

SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AND SOCIAL POLICY REFORMS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Social policy and its institutions have been changing considerably over the past two decades in OECD countries, especially in pensions and family policy. Reforms reduced public pension benefits, introduced occupational pensions, strengthened minimum income for older persons, and expanded public childcare and parental leave programmes. Due to socioeconomic changes there was an obvious need for social policy recalibration, yet the degree of reforms adopted as well as their outcomes might depend on political actors and institutions. However, we lack knowledge to what extent national political factors moderate the effect of socioeconomic changes on social policy reforms.

The literature so far has explained reforms adopted by different countries either with similarity arising from their similar socioeconomic changes (e.g. ageing, de-industrialisation and higher female labour force participation) or with diversity because of national institutions (e.g. veto players and partisanship). This junior research group aims to investigate both the effects of socioeconomic changes on recent social policy reforms and the moderating role of national political institutions and actors across and within OECD countries.

To achieve the aim, the group will develop a framework to analyse the combined effects of socioeconomic changes and political institutions and actors on social policy recalibration. Building on cross-country data and detailed knowledge of the PI/team about individual countries such as Austria, the group will test the theoretical framework with time-series cross-section models and country case studies. Furthermore, the team will analyse regional social policy and social policy recalibration within countries at the level of federal states as social benefits for migrants and childcare provision, for example, vary by federal state in countries such as Austria and Germany.