

Convergence and Europeanisation  
The Political Economy of Social and Labour Market Policies

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Summary

Social convergence has been an objective since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, but it was only in 1997 and 2000 that social and labour market policies were formulated at the European Union level. To what extent have national social and labour market policies in EU member states converged over time? What is the influence of EU policy initiatives and European economic integration on national welfare state reforms? Moreover, what factors can explain differences in the extent to which member states have changed their policies accordingly?

Based on quantitative analyses of welfare state changes since the 1980s in EU and other OECD countries, this study provides a number of new insights into the research on the Europeanisation of welfare states. A wide range of indicators shows that welfare state policies, welfare state regimes and policy outcomes such as poverty rates have converged across EU countries. However, no pattern of convergence has been found for the group of countries that entered the EU in 2004. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the functioning of the open method of coordination in employment policy. It shows that the European Employment Strategy has contributed to an increased emphasis on activation in national labour market policy reforms. The study's results indicate that European economic integration and globalisation have also affected welfare states. Based on an innovative approach that relies on data on private social security arrangements, it is shown that increased international economic integration triggers the demand for social protection. The insights gained in this study could improve the effectiveness of the EU social and labour market policies and, consequently, achievement of the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy.