

Changing Welfare States: From distributive politics towards social crisis prevention?

Thursdays, 9:00-11:00

Instructor: Anton Hemerijck

Contact: Claudia Fanti (Claudia.Fanti@eui.eu)

Aims

European welfare states are (once again) under intellectual and material reconstruction, in the aftermath of a series of crises and in view of predictable disruptions from the double transition of climate and technological change. National governments and the EU had to -- and will have to -- take unprecedented action to protect lives and livelihoods, while political processes are not necessarily conducive to make this happen. The openness of welfare states, especially in Europe, is both a challenge and a possible remedy. Welfare states have long been considered to be ties that bind a capitalist economy and a democratic polity together, if in different ways. They generate their own social order, more or less distinct from markets, and create communities of risk that have more less egalitarian social citizenship in their wake. Overall, the welfare state has shown resilience but these and other irritants conjure up pressures for welfare state adaptation and contestation. The diversity of European welfare states and the EU's evolving capabilities can be exploited to study their combined systemic capacity for reform and adaptation to structural change.

The course offers a comparative analysis of modern welfare state development and social reform against the background of economic, political, and social transformations. The aim is to introduce researchers to the state of the art in comparative welfare state research literature, with a special emphasis on structural change, including the feminization of the labour market, demographic aging, economic internationalization and the legacy of a systemic financial crisis and the pandemic on diverse national welfare states and EU social policy. The course aims to provide researchers with advanced knowledge in the basic institutions underlying modern welfare states and explaining their variation over time. Furthermore, the course provides skills in comparative cross-national and European welfare policy analysis, with special attention given to competing theories on welfare state change and continuity in terms of their theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses.

In the first part, the seminar aims to provide researchers with advanced knowledge of debates that motivated welfare state research before the long crisis decade since 2008 and to revisit these in the light of recent events. We will look at the comparative evidence and discuss the evidence on how national welfare systems have performed, what major external interventions like Troika programmes have done and whether welfare states have recovered, reformed and perhaps, in the process, become more preventative in their approach to social risks. Each time we ask, what are the political drivers and actors to outcomes of interest. In the second part, the focus of the sessions will shift to state-of-the-art approaches in welfare state research, ranging from electoral studies on the popularity of welfare

provisions, the spatial dimension of the welfare state when looking at places and communities left behind, as well as analyses that see the middle-class welfare state or promoting social investment as the way out of the scarring that crises inflicted. This prepares the final session in which we debate whether welfare states need to get ready for continuous social crisis prevention, given the reality of climate change but also the political fallout of repeated social crises that lead to political polarisation and arguably jeopardises democracy.

Each of the seminars is led by one or two participants on the basis of pre-discussions with the course convener responsible for the session.

Overview of sessions

1. Welfare state regimes: staying power of an analytical lens and the difficulty of letting go?
2. Welfare state transformations: back to the future?
3. Welfare performance in the wake of the Great Recession
4. From the austerity reflex to the search for resilience
5. Is social investment still the answer?
6. The electoral turn in welfare state politics
7. Spatial inequality and populism in places left behind
8. The knowledge economy and the meritocratic middle-class welfare state
9. Beveridge's five giants in hindsight
10. Debate: Beyond distributive politics towards social crisis prevention?

Objectives

Researchers who have successfully completed this course should be able to:

- Make clear and concise oral presentations on the basis of serious reading and looking up relevant data where appropriate. Learn to lead the seminar discussion and summarise the results of a two hour long debate.
- Design and write briefing paper on the multidimensional politics of welfare and its transformations for at least one week.
- The course will provide researchers with the conceptual and empirical background information to explain welfare state performance in very hard times that may become permanent.

To successfully complete the course, participants have to attend in person, volunteer to lead at least one of the sessions with another participant, and write one briefing paper.