

# **Recovery and Resilience Instruments Layering on EU Social Governance and Europeanisation Processes. Italy and France in Comparison**

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The paper aims to contribute to the analysis of the transformations that are involving social policy systems in Europe after the launch of the Next Generation EU (NGEU). Within this program, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is sustaining several reforms and investments in national plans. Although a good part of them focuses on green and digital transitions, the social dimension is by no means irrelevant. As reported by the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard, on average 28% of the resources of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) are invested in social policy interventions. This scenario sets the possibilities to relaunch the social policy sector in Europe – or at least to give more relevance to it.

The debates that intersect each other and frame this study are the European governance of the social dimension and the issue of Europeanisation. The former helps to understand how the RRF is layering on a complex system of instruments and actors of governance, while the latter provides us with the lenses to discuss how the renewed European layout might affect the national social policy systems. Within this framework, the paper tries to address three research questions: 1) How does the Recovery and Resilience Facility relate to the pre-existing governance framework? 2) Which inputs of Europeanisation does it generate in the social policy fields? 3) How do these inputs take shape and have an influence on domestic social policy systems? This latter question is intrinsically comparative. The contribution, therefore, develops a comparative design on two case studies, Italy and France. These national contexts are different regarding the history and development of the welfare state and institutional articulation. Therefore, this choice allows for comparing contrasting models under the same European governance instruments and Europeanisation inputs.

To explore the first two questions, I analyzed the documentation available on the NGEU and the Recovery and Resilience facility. As for the third, I focused on the national documentation regarding the NRRPs of Italy and France and I reconstructed the processes through which the investments and reforms have been agreed, designed and implemented. At the present time, I am planning interviews with national key informants to deepen the multilevel relationship between the European and the domestic level (both central and local).

To analyze how the RRF relates to the pre-existing governance framework (first research question), I focus on two dimensions: the coordination between EU social

and economic policy, and the coordination within the EU social dimension. As for the first dimension, I investigate both policy orientations (vision, principles and objectives that are leading the “new” Europe) and governance procedures (actors and instruments) of the RRF. In the analysis of the coordination within the social dimension, I investigate connections and synergies between the RRF and the “socialized” components of the European Semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the other programs and instruments operating in the social sector – especially the EU Cohesion policy, within which there are the European Social Fund+, the European Regional Development Fund, and Cohesion Fund Operational Programmes.

Moving to the second research question about the “new” inputs for Europeanisation, I make a point on the specific mechanisms at stake and the domestic dimensions on which this influence is exerted. The RRF introduces important developments in both these fields given, on the one hand, its monetary and performance-based nature and, on the other hand, the enhanced relevance attributed to the central-state level in the multilevel configuration of the governance.

In the last and comparative analytical passage, I try to test the hypothesis that the substantial influence of the EU level vis-à-vis the member states is proportional to the number of resources requested under the RRF and to the criticality of the need for those financial resources by the member states; indeed, given some structural characteristics, Europeanisation processes might be strengthened in Southern and Eastern European countries, rather than in the Nordic and continental ones. Both these elements strongly vary among countries, with Italy and France representing two opposite cases.

In conclusion, this contribution offers a deep and systematic analysis of the Recovery and Resilience instruments in relation to the social policy field and brings original evidence on the processes of design and implementation of national social policies within this renewed EU governance framework.