

Socio-economic insecurity and family benefits: the case of the Italian Single Universal Allowance reform

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The introduction of the Single Universal Child Allowance in 2021 marked a deep turning point for Italian family policy. Presented as a big revolution aimed at combating the country's alarmingly low birth rates as well as child poverty, the reform was also meant to rationalize the benefits system, while overcoming the historical fragmentation and the uneven protection granted to families. Against this backdrop, the article aims at contributing to the literature from two different angles. First, the study offers fresh empirical evidence about the path-shifting scope of the reform, marking a rupture with the long-lasting weak model of income support for families. Second, the article engages from an interpretative standpoint with the puzzling cross-party consensus observed around approval. Drawing from the comparative literature on institutional change and the modernization of family policies, the article asks which factors made it possible - after decades of substantial inertia - to overcome path dependency through cross-party agreement in Italy, providing an in-depth original examination of parties' positions throughout the legislative process, identifying key elements of agreement and conflict.