

Reform or continuity? Comparing approaches to care policy in Southern European NRRPs

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I will present the preparatory work for my dissertation, which will be dedicated to assessing the elements driving the design and implementation of care policies in the Italian and Spanish national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs), with a specific focus on their gendered aspects. An observation of the emergency and recovery measures concerning care shows a puzzling contrast between the adoption of innovative instruments during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Italy, and a return to the status quo in the policy design of NRRPs. My research will attempt to provide an explanation of the resistance to change characterising the Italian and Spanish approaches to care, relying on a review of the existing literature. The hypothesis is that this contrast in the approaches to care policy in the two phases was brought about by a clash between the role of actors vis à vis the one structural elements of the two welfare states. While policymakers were able to introduce elements of innovation in the emergency phase, the policy legacy was the most relevant element shaping the policy design of NRRPs. That was largely due to the fact that the short timespan allowed to draft the recovery plans led to the inclusion of investments that had “lingered into the drawers” without being implemented due to the lack of fundings. Measures in line with the pre-pandemic care regime became thus predominant in the NRRPs. Evidence supporting these claims will be provided with reference to the literature, and indication on the empirical approach that will be adopted to test these claims will be provided. In particular, it must be noted that the cases of Italy and Spain will be approached through a most different case design. In fact, while the two countries’ similarities have been widely documented by the literature, the care and gender regimes characterising Italy and Spain diverged in recent year, with Spain implementing defamiliarizing and gender equality policies, while Italy stagnated. However, both recovery plans registered a continuity in respect to the pre-pandemic policy approach.