

# **Stability and Change in the face of major Crises: an analysis of the Portuguese Social Security System**

*Maria Clara Oliveira (CoLABOR)*

The article explores the link between critical junctures (crises) and social policy change by looking into the Portuguese experience. Portugal lived through the financial crisis of 2008, the euro crisis and Troika's structural adjustment measures implemented in response (2010/2014). It was then hit by the pandemic crisis (2020-2022) and has been severely affected by high inflation (2022-2023).

While recognizing that all fields of social policy might be affected by crises, this article focuses on the social security system. The multiple and varied critical events added extra pressure to a system that was already challenged by several factors. The article analyses the effects of the crises on the Portuguese social security system and discusses whether the system has been able to effectively respond to them and the policy changes that have been made.

The aim of the article is to understand how the social security system has evolved and how crises constrain the decisions taken regarding its design and functioning. In other words, it seeks to understand whether crises correspond to moments of reinforcement of the operating modes underway or whether, on the contrary, they allow changes to take place, which may contribute to strengthening the system or, conversely, to its weakening. The analysis over the last 15 years encompasses several critical moments and makes it possible to recognise continuities and changes, as well as to identify different types of changes that occur. It also allows the naming of the factors that facilitate or block the reconfiguration of the system.

Thus, the article is structured around the following research question: have the crises of the last 15 years led to the reconfiguration of the Portuguese social security system? To answer this question, the article combines ideational and institutionalist perspectives. The analysis will also take into account the interplay between international actors (i.e. Troika) and the national government in the debates revolving around social policies.

The article is based on a review of the literature on continuity and change in social policies. A review of the literature on the Portuguese social security system is also carried out. To complement the information, we analyse official documents, legislation, parliamentary debates, as well as relevant statistical data.

The article contributes to advancing debates on change and continuity in social policies and the discussion around reconfigurations of the welfare state in southern European countries.