

Back from the Cold? Progressive Politics and Social Policy Paradigms in Southern Europe after the Great Recession

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The article examines the programmatic evolution of social democratic parties in Italy, Portugal and Spain, three countries in which the centre-left has governed in the last decade. To do so, the article develops an analytical framework for mapping social and labour market policy reforms and assessing their liberalising, regularising or recalibrating character. In explanatory terms, the article studies the coalitional politics behind social democratic reforms as being conditional upon the relationships with organised interests, electoral social blocs and party system dynamics. The comparative analysis shows both commonalities and differences: the three cases range from post-industrial recalibration (Italy) to inclusive egalitarianism (Spain), with Portugal taking a middling path, closer to Spain. Overall, in these countries a move away from both traditional 'social protectionism' and crisis-era internal devaluation has taken place, but it has taken different forms depending on country-specific dynamics within the left and trade union camps.