

Reconfiguring Welfare States in the Post-industrial Age: What Role for Trade Unions?

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Research questions

What determines how constructive or obstructive trade unions are in welfare reforms?

Which modes of social governance allow trade unions to influence pension reforms?

Under which conditions will union opposition to or engagement in 'activating' labour market reforms be more likely?

How can trade unions successfully resist the privatization of social risks through collectivization?

Can trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe play an active role in welfare reform processes? How can the role in wage bargaining be reconciled with the role in welfare administration, for instance in health care reforms?

Main research findings

It is important to distinguish a political-institutional and an economic role of trade unions because the two roles can be traded off against each other in welfare reforms.

Trade unions may be weakened in their economic role, ie as wage bargainers in the market place, and yet retain their political governance role in occupational pensions and labour market policies (Ebbinghaus, France in Clegg and van Wijnbergen).

Or vice versa, trade unions with hardly any policy-making influence as in Poland and Serbia or Southern European countries can still fulfil and even strengthen their economic function for the individual welfare of organised workers (Bernaciak et al, Italy and Greece in Johnston et al).

Collectivization, rather than individualization and privatization, of welfare is a distinct possibility when the welfare state retreats (Johnston et al).

Conversely, professional organisations may actually be empowered while collective representations of workers lose out (Heins and Parry).

The political-administrative role is more conducive to a permanent, legitimate role of trade unions in welfare state restructuring.

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WP04
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