

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

Action number: IS1409

STSM title: “Comparing Pension Reforms in Germany and Ireland”.

STSM start and end date: 01/04/2019 to 12/04/2019

Grantee name: Dr Eva Katharina Sarter

PURPOSE OF THE STSM/

(max.500 words)

Over the past few decades, European countries have experienced and are still experiencing demographic changes, oftentimes summarised under the capture of an ‘ageing population’. In response, a number of countries have reformed their pension systems. At the same time, supra-national organisations and particularly the EU, issued recommendations for pension reforms (e.g. European Commission, 2010). It has been shown that processes of policy diffusion are not only influential in fostering the adoption of reforms but also influence the timing as well as the content of reforms (Brooks, 2005; Hennessy and Steinwand, 2014; Orenstein, 2005; Stepan and Anderson, 2014). Hence, given similar challenges as well as particularly European recommendations, which may influence domestic policies, one would assume that pension reforms show similarities and increase convergence of pension regulations. Yet, pension reforms in European countries encounter vastly differed traditions in the different member states, which impact the general structure of Welfare States today (among others Esping-Andersen, 1990). Taking account of path dependence theory, which underlying trend towards stability (or ‘inertia’) of institutional structures and policies (Greener, 2005; Pierson, 2000), one would expect that change happens within underlying alignments and basic orientations (Pierson, 2000). As a result, one would assume that the initial and ongoing divergence of pension systems leads to an underlying trend towards stability, which are modified by gradual rather than sudden change. Against this background, this STSM aimed to analyse pension reforms in two countries, a conservative and a liberal Welfare State (Germany and Ireland); the results of which are to be presented in a contribution to an academic journal.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM

(max.500 words)

At the beginning of this STSM, the opportunity emerged to include a further academic working at NUI Galway, who is an expert on pensions in another EU member state (Poland), Dr Anna Urbaniak. As Poland, as a post-communist country, represents a different Welfare Regime than

Ireland and Germany, including Poland provided the opportunity to broaden the comparison and thereby strengthen the analysis. Given the fact that the newly arisen opportunity to include a third country would be beneficial to the comparative work carried out during the STSM, the scope of the comparison was amended. This led to two major changes. By strengthening the underlying question of assessing the changes against the assumptions drawn from the literature, the inclusion of a third country led to the question whether two questions underlying the comparison carried out in this STSM were to be presented in one or two academic articles. Secondly, the work plan, which was based on the comparison of two countries (Ireland and Germany), was modified to accommodate this change.

During this STSM, the (now) three collaborating partners discussed and agreed on the theoretical approach and the underlying question. Based on this agreement, the applicant drafted a section that outlines the underlying question (assessing the change based on assumptions derived from the insights gained in the literature on policy diffusion and path dependence). Following the initial meeting, the previously drafted outline of recent policy reforms in relation to pensions in Germany was distributed. This served as a base for brief outlines of pension reforms in Ireland and Poland. Based on this, both collaborators started work on sections that outline the main reforms in Ireland and Poland. Further meetings were held to discuss the changes in the three countries, identify similarities and divergences in the developments of the three countries, and highlight the implications of these findings for the original question.

As a result of the work carried out during this STSM, large parts of a first article have been drafted; the remaining parts are being finalised. We furthermore identified a journal and plan to submit this article in May 2019. In addition, first parts of a second article have been drafted. The work on this article is ongoing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

(max. 500 words)

The envisioned objectives of the work were slightly amended during this STSM. More specifically, it was decided that the output of the comparison carried out was two articles, one that assesses the changes against the background of assumptions based on the literature on policy diffusion and path dependence and one on the gender implications rather than one as envisioned originally.

Relating to the first article, which seeks to assess the changes in the light of existing literature, the three collaborators identified a theoretical framework and assumptions that this framework generates regarding pension reforms in the three countries. We furthermore identified a number of similar trends in pension reforms that reflect European recommendations. While policy recommendations and the common framework hence seems to have an impact, the changes observed were mostly gradual. In addition, these reforms were not a stable as one would assume; subsequent reforms in at least one country have reversed or limited previous changes relating to the extension of working lives and the alignment of pension ages for men and women.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

(max.500 words)

