

Peter Taylor-Gooby, Benjamin Leruth and Heejung Chung (eds) *After Austerity: Welfare State Transformation in Europe After the Great Recession* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 229 pp, £25.49 (pbk). ISBN: 9780198790273 Reviewed by: Norman Ginsburg, London Metropolitan University, UK

This book should be immensely useful for students of comparative social policy in the EU. In just over two hundred pages of consistently accessible writing, it updates on developments since the financial crisis in the late 00s. The central chapters focus respectively on nine EU member states (plus Norway), while framing chapters by the editors deal respectively with the socioeconomic and political context, the EU, and future policy direction. Helpfully the findings are summarised in a large table in the final chapter.

Unsurprisingly the main thesis is that there has been 'a shift towards austerity and neo-liberalism' which is 'more rapid in some countries than others' (Table 10.1). This seems something of an understatement: at one extreme, the welfare state in Greece has been devastated by the EU bailout; at the other extreme in Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark the welfare state seems to have survived more or less intact with increased social investment in education and childcare. In Britain, Spain and Italy the last decade has witnessed major cuts in benefits, services and social investment alongside increasing inequalities and unmet needs. So there is increasing divergence, reinforcing an Esping-Andersen typology, with the liberal and southern European regimes diminishing, while the continental/Bismarckian and Nordic regimes are largely undiminished and even expanding in some areas of social investment. The country specific chapters do a good job in mapping and describing developments, though the themes from the framing chapters tend not to be used explicitly, making direct comparison tricky. The chapter on Greece is particularly important, of course, in conveying the depth and impact of the ongoing crisis there. The focus overall is largely on policy areas linked to the labour market, such as childcare, unemployment, in-work benefits etc. Housing, education and healthcare do not really feature.

The book opens with some important remarks about 'social cleavages'. The post-war welfare state was founded on 'broad class coalitions', cross-class social solidarity and universalism in provision; this settlement has been undermined by increasing income inequalities and labour market divisions. However the book does not say too much about the impact of insider/outsider status (or dualisation) on employment benefits and rights. Page two refers to 'the complexity and intersection of various attitude cleavages that have emerged around class, age, gender, ethnicity/immigration, and nationalism'. These are surely more than what are described as 'attitude cleavages', but, anyway, the policy impact of such social divisions is not systematically pursued. There is some welcome attention to national welfare chauvinism and to the recent EU refugee crisis. However the term 'immigrant' is mostly used as a blanket term to refer to asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, and perhaps settled people of minority ethnic origin. The diversity of policy responses to the refugee crisis needs more nuanced analysis, to say nothing of responses to the needs and inequalities faced by settled minorities. On gender, there is disappointingly little; it is recognised that gender roles and family patterns continue to change, but the only policy area linked to this is childcare, which is given some useful prominence. The impact of the financial crisis, neoliberalism and austerity on women and on gender inequality is not really addressed, despite considerable published research thereon. Some attention is given to the pressure of an ageing population on social spending and services. The final chapter suggests (p. 205) that 'an increasing number of old people squeeze the needs of younger generations' resulting in 'a tendency to favour spending on older generations against younger ones'. This uncritical embrace of the intergenerational conflict thesis is contentious and the evidence cited is thin.

So, this book updates on some critical comparative questions, but might have offered more on the impact of the crisis and of recent policy on social cleavages. The title is perhaps over-optimistic.