Explaining longitudinal and cross-country changes in support for conditional unemployment benefits

In this paper we investigate trends in support for conditional unemployment benefits across European countries. In a prior work (Carriero & Filandri 2018), we found that support for conditionality increased substantially from 1990 to 2008, becoming majoritarian in most European countries, except for Russia and Ukraine. Multilevel analyses revealed the role played by income inequality. The latter was interpreted, on the macro-level, as a social distance measure and an indicator of the operation of the identity criterion of deservingness. In societies where inequality increased, so did the support for conditional unemployment benefits because the majority of citizens became more distanced from the unemployed and hence less sympathetic. However, the impact of the great recession that began in 2008 has not been yet considered. With the release of 2017 data, we aim at replicating and extending our previous work and interpreting emerging trends. Our research questions are: Is the positive trend in support for conditionality still present in countries that have been hit more severely by the crisis? Is the role of inequality the same as that found in previous research? Are trends in countries where the worsening economic conditions were accompanied by concomitant increases in inequality different from those where the recession did not bring about increasing inequality? Moreover, using trend data on concerns with the unemployed people's living conditions, the new EVS release will allow to test the mechanism through which income inequality increases social distance between the majority and the unemployed and in turn affects support for conditionality.