

**To be submitted to the stream:**

14. Post-socialist welfare systems

*(13. Family policies and the reconciling of paid work and care)*

**Abstract:**

**Financial support for families in Central and Eastern Europe: Differences, similarities, and the impact of recession**

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It is common to regard the welfare systems of countries from Central and Eastern Europe as being similar. Twenty years after the fall of communism, some researchers still classify them into one “post-socialist” type. At the beginning of the transition process the social policies of the Eastern Bloc countries were indeed in many respects comparable. However, during the nineties each of these countries was compelled to reduce the level of social expenditure and embark on a new course in social policy making. This paper focuses on policy measures supporting families with children. Using unique data on the tax benefit system as of December 2008 and April 2009 it explores the similarities and differences in (a) the structure and level of financial provisions for families, and (b) the policy responses to the recession in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland. A micro-level analysis is applied to examine how much financial benefit is obtained by different types of families using a “Model Family Method”. Comparison is based on an indicator assessing the difference in the value of all child related benefits when contrasted with benefits paid to families with no children. The key questions addressed are: Which family types are supported most by national governments? How generous are governments to vulnerable family forms? Do welfare state policies encourage parents to be in employment? Are there marked differences between countries in this respect? And finally, has the level, structure, or focus of welfare provisions in any of the countries changed due to recession?

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