

To be submitted to the stream:

16. Welfare state attitudes and economic crisis

Abstract:

Attitudes toward provision of childcare services and the role of social benefits: expectations and reality.

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Affordable and accessible quality childcare provision is recognized at the EU level as playing a vital role in facilitating the combination of work and care responsibilities, reducing child poverty rates, and increasing gender equality. Throughout Europe, however, the availability of childcare still differs considerably. Moreover, the public in some European countries favours higher family benefits over accessible services, especially in times of economic downturn. This paper uses two main sources of data. Firstly, data from the European Social Survey round 4 enable us to explore the European public's attitudes towards (a) the state's role in provision of childcare, (b) the accessibility of affordable childcare, and (c) the role of social benefits in family life. Assuming that attitudes are moderated by national institutional context, we further use data on European tax-benefit systems as of 2008/9 to investigate the relationship between the public's expectations of the role of welfare state, their (dis)satisfaction with the provision of childcare, and the reality of financial support available to them. The aim of the paper is to analyze whether there are discrepancies between "supply" and "demand" and whether attitudes towards the role of social benefits are reflected in the policy outcomes. Specific attention is paid to the former Eastern Block (CEE) countries where the now scarce but once widely available state-run childcare facilities and historically level income might have planted a common deep-rooted belief that it is the state's responsibility to ensure sufficient child care services and equal standards of living to all. Is this still the case, or is there no longer a consensus within public opinion on welfare provisions in CEE countries?

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