

Abstract for the ESPANET Conference 2010

Session 2: Poverty and social exclusion

Convenor: Bea Cantillon, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

Title: The anti-poverty dimension of family policies in three new EU member states: Hungary, Poland and Romania

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Abstract. The paper comparatively investigates the anti-poverty dimension of family policies in three new member states from Central and Eastern Europe with high rates of child-poverty and considerably different policy arrangements targeting families with children: Hungary, Poland and Romania. It seeks to explore to what extent, in the aftermath of pro-natalist policies of state socialism, these “emergency” welfare states (Inglot, 2008) reshaped their redistributive mechanisms towards a child-centred “social investment” (Titmuss, 1958; Lewis, 2008) model. What types of adjustments in the scope of state transfers for families with children were induced and/or legitimized by the financial crisis? What was the role of European institutions in shaping policy responses to child poverty in the context of rising budgetary deficits and unemployment rates? To what extent did state transfers tackle poverty and reduce material inequality between families with dependent children? Which types of households received most cash transfers per child, and which the least?

Searching for answers, we analyse the evolution of policy inputs, outputs and outcomes (Kvist, 2008) in terms of cash-transfers for pre-school aged children, bearing attention to the urban-rural divide. Along with the empirical data provided by Eurostat and EU-SILC 2007, we use micro-simulations on the impact of cash transfers on the overall economic situation of various types of families with dependent children. Despite of some anticipated similarities among post-state-socialist welfare states, our analysis reveals considerable differences in the poverty-reduction strategies, governments’ efforts and the effects of policies. In Hungary, family policies perform to a large degree progressive redistribution in favour of poor families, while maintaining an important universal component. In Romania, although compound, family policies have only weak impact on child-poverty, especially in the case of large families. In Poland, the modest redistribution is masked by the exclusion of better-off families from receiving state transfers for children.

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