

**Stream: 3. Comparative methodology - Neglected issues and innovative methods:
Identifying best practice**

Is policy index an effective analytical tool in comparative research of childcare policies?
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Abstract

This paper analyzes childcare policies in eight countries – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, in order to explore their interrelationship with maternal employment, and to probe the applicability of the varieties of familialism to post-socialist countries. It develops two policy indices to analyze legal prescriptions and rules on childcare leave and childcare service provision, rather than use information on the use of these policies. To more accurately measure policies in a cross-country comparative perspective, it uses benchmarking approach, in order to show that each policy creates both incentives and dilemmas for women to continuously participate in the paid labour force.

I measure childcare policies with twelve more subtle policy characteristics, which more accurately reflect the policies. To analyze each policy as a configuration of various policy aspects, I build a policy index for each of the two childcare policies and use them as (i) analytical tools to manage policy complexity in a cross-country analysis, as well as (ii) variables of childcare policies in statistical analysis of interrelationship between policies and maternal employment. To build the indices from more subtle policy aspects, I use a benchmarking technique. This is a Weberian ideal-types approach, with which I analyze the conformity of policies to a variety of ideal-types: each policy component for each country is assessed and compared against a set of uniform standards repeatedly in subsequent points in time and across countries. Underlying this approach is the postulate that a range of more subtle policy characteristics more accurately reflect national policies than any single indicator, and hence an index facilitates cross-country comparative research of childcare policies. I will argue that the index provides a more accurate measure of national policies, because policies are measured with various and more subtle policy components, and is an efficient analytical tool for managing policy complexity in a cross-country comparative research. But notwithstanding its numerous advantages to policy analysis, it also has a number of weaknesses, such as selection of standards, weighting, multi/collinearity, which this paper will address.

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