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Stream 8.1. Minimum Incomes in the Enlarged Europe

Title: Minimum Income Protection Across Europe. The Evolution of Benefit Levels Since the Early 1990s

Authors:

Tim Goedemé

Natascha Van Mechelen

Ive Marx

Bea Cantillon

Jonas Vogels

Minimum income schemes are typically designed as the protection scheme of last-resort in the welfare state. However, the link between the level of minimum income protection and poverty remains an unresolved puzzle in the literature. A crucial requirement for a better understanding of this link is good international comparative data on minimum income protection schemes. In this paper we present net benefit levels of minimum income protection schemes in the new Eastern EU member states by comparing them with data from the 'old' EU member states. Original data were gathered in an international project organised by the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy, involving national experts from a majority of EU member states. By using pre-defined templates for calculating benefit levels for several model families, the maximisation of cross-national comparability has been pursued. We present benefit levels for working-age singles, couples (with and without children) and lone parents as well as for elderly singles and couples in June 2009. By comparing benefit levels with net incomes of average wage earners as well as poverty thresholds, we perform a first check of adequacy of these benefits. Furthermore, we present some trends by comparing data from a similar project covering the early 1990s and early 2000s.

Contact details:

Tim Goedemé

PhD Research Fellow of the Research Foundation – Flanders

Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

University of Antwerp

St. Jacobstr. 2 (M.479)

2000 Antwerp

Belgium

Tel.: + 32 3 265 55 55

[tim.goedeme@ua.ac.be](mailto:tim.goedeme@ua.ac.be)

Dr. Natascha Van Mechelen

Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

University of Antwerp

St. Jacobstr. 2 (M.480)

2000 Antwerp

Belgium

Tel.: + 32 3 265 55 45

[natascha.vanmechelen@ua.ac.be](mailto:natascha.vanmechelen@ua.ac.be)

Prof. dr. Ive Marx

Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

University of Antwerp

St. Jacobstr. 2 (M.473)

2000 Antwerp

Belgium

Tel.: + 32 3 265 53 95

[ive.marx@ua.ac.be](mailto:ive.marx@ua.ac.be)

Prof. dr. Bea Cantillon

Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

University of Antwerp

St. Jacobstr. 2 (M.475)

2000 Antwerp

Belgium

Tel.: + 32 3 265 53 98

[bea.cantillon@ua.ac.be](mailto:bea.cantillon@ua.ac.be)

Jonas Vogels

Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy

University of Antwerp

St. Jacobstr. 2 (M.471)

2000 Antwerp

Belgium

Tel.: + 32 3 265 53 68

[jonas.vogels@ua.ac.be](mailto:jonas.vogels@ua.ac.be)