



The future of research and policy in social protection and inclusion

Parallel Session 3
Chair: Magdi BIRTHA, European Centre

UNOV | 26 September 2024

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY AND RESEARCH



26 September | 14.30 | Room CR6

Objectives

- Presentation of the Discussion Paper
- Getting feedback and fresh ideas from experts
- Identify additional areas of future research in the area of social protection and inclusion
- Networking and forging potential partnerships

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Presentation of the Discussion Paper

Eszter Zólyomi

European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

Comments

Karin Heitzmann

Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria



Building resilient social protection systems for all

Magdi BIRTHA, Felix Groß-Wohlgemuth, Michael Fuchs, Eszter Zólyomi, Sabina Gjylsheni

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SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY
AND RESEARCH



Discussion paper of the Social Protection and Inclusion (SPI) team



Magdi Birta



Michael Fuchs



Sabina Gjylsheni



Felix Groß-Wohlgemuth



Eszter Zólyomi



Building resilient social protection systems for all

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This discussion paper was prepared for the Invitational Conference "The Future of Social Welfare Policy and Research" on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the European Centre. It focuses on one of the key areas of the European Centre's research and policy consultancy, aiming to highlight its achievements and discuss the way forward in future research strategies. We are grateful for any comments that will be included and acknowledged in the final version to be published during autumn 2024.

Abstract

This discussion paper presents an overview of key challenges and trends in the UNECE region in four policy areas relevant to the Social Protection and Inclusion Research team at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research: 1) Social assistance and minimum income policies, 2) Child and family policies, 3) Disability policies and social support services, and 4) Housing policies. The discussion paper identifies research needs and future perspectives on policy directions to ensure social inclusion for all through resilient social protection systems amid ongoing crises framed by megatrends. Synergies between different policy areas, such as between the economy, social affairs, employment, education and health policies, as well as between different levels of governance and types of support (monetary and non-monetary), are key. Strong partnerships among stakeholders to implement tailor-made and human rights-based solutions are needed to improve policy outcomes and decrease inequalities.

Motivation

- Social Protection systems to help individuals and households manage risks linked to income and livelihoods, and to achieve societal outcomes (reducing poverty and inequality, promoting wellbeing, social stability)
- Evolving and emerging risks from climate change, digitalisation, technological acceleration, ageing populations,...
- Existing gaps in SP systems, large inequalities between and within countries, differences in policy approaches (e.g., responses to/lessons learnt from Covid-19, cost-of-living crisis)
- Research needs, directions for future research, our contribution

Aim and scope

- Key policy developments and challenges
- Future perspectives for policy and research

Focusing on 4 policy areas in SPI:

- social assistance and minimum income
- child and family policies
- disability policies and social support services
- housing



Past policy changes and major challenges

Minimum income protection

Around 35% of the working-age population at risk of poverty is not covered by minimum income or any other social benefits in the EU

- Integrated 3-pillar approach (2008 EC Recommendation): adequate income support, inclusive labour markets, access to quality services
- Poverty alleviation, cost containment and work incentives (trade-offs!)
- Low coverage and/or take-up rate distorts intended welfare effect
- Heterogeneous needs and employment barriers of clients
- Essential in-kind benefits and services not always integrated and coordinated with minimum income provision

Past policy changes and major challenges

Child and family policies

In 2023, 24.8% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty and social exclusion

- EU-level initiatives to decrease poverty and its effect among children (Barcelona targets, European Child Guarantee), and to support work-life balance (minimum standards for leave, incl. for fathers)
- Country differences in children's AROPE rates, childcare participation rates (especially among children younger than 3 years)
- EU countries spend increasingly more on policies supporting the reconciliation of work and family life, yet, take-up of benefits and participation of fathers remains low in several countries, persisting gender gaps in employment and care work
- Coherence between policy instruments (services, benefits, tax benefits, leave entitlements)

Past policy changes and major challenges

Disability policies

In 2021, 29.7% of the EU population aged 16+ with a disability was at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared with 18.8% of those without disability

- UN CRPD - legal basis for disability policies since 2006, implementation is ongoing at different speed
- Situation of persons with disabilities has not improved significantly - limited access to the open labour market, persistent employment gap between persons with and without disabilities, discrimination/stigma
- Effective access to social protection requires not only adequate disability benefits, but also addressing specific barriers, promoting decent work, creating accessible and inclusive infrastructure, processes and services – shift needed in the social welfare system
- Enabling, human rights-based approach

Past policy changes and major challenges

Housing

In 2022, nearly 1 in 2 citizens in the EU lived in a home lacking adequate space, and 15% reported problems with the state of their dwelling

- In general, strong promotion of homeownership in (Western) Europe since the 1980s, different patterns of transition in tenure across EU countries – variation in policies, path dependencies
- Declining housing affordability esp. among lower-income groups, private tenants, young people (growing intergenerational and class divide, prolonged co-residence, spatial segregation)
- Housing benefits most widespread instruments of housing support, issues with adequate compensation for real housing costs and reaching those who need it
- Insufficient supply of and limited access to social/public housing in most EU countries

Lessons from recent crises

- Targeting, identification of beneficiaries of SP schemes is key
 - Many people affected at the same time (Covid-19, energy and cost-of-living crisis), vulnerable groups disproportionately (e.g., children and parents, persons with disabilities)
 - Existing beneficiaries of social protection and those affected by a shock may not overlap
- Most EU countries implemented ad-hoc policies or had automatic stabilisers in place to mitigate the negative consequences – need to progressively build on/transform such measures into comprehensive and shock-responsive SP systems for future crisis/risk mitigation
- Underinvestment in SP systems meant that many countries were ill prepared – strengthening the social investment case, importance of social services

Future perspectives**Building inclusive social protection systems framed by megatrends**

Given green and digital transformations, social safety nets are even more required to support labour market transitions, active participation of people with disadvantages, and ensure social inclusion for all:

- Closing existing gaps in SP systems
- Holistic approach in re-thinking how social welfare systems can enable people and foster inclusion
- Adapting to new risks while retaining fairness and redistribution objectives
- Compensating for negative impacts of mitigation measures
- Creating synergies between different policy areas
- Building strong partnerships between stakeholders
- Developing a research agenda that can help guide policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the way forward

Future perspectives

Policy and research needs

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of social protection policies - only slightly more than half of the EU Member States have regular monitoring mechanisms on minimum income schemes in place (esp. important for measuring levels of non-take-up)
- More systemically collected disaggregated data including disability-inclusive disaggregated data are needed
- Interactions/joint effects of different policy instruments e.g. to explain gender gaps among parents, child poverty rates and find effective policies against it, link between housing exclusion and overall inequalities
- ...

Our contribution

- Offering quantitative and qualitative analysis and comparative research across countries in the UNECE region
- Facilitating social policy dialogue, mutual learning among different stakeholders, providing tailor-made training modules and carrying out other consultation processes
- Our current focus areas: social protection policies; poverty, income inequality and non-monetary aspects of well-being; social services and support measures for marginalized groups; and the ageing society



European Disability Expertise-EDE II

The effect of COVID-19 on poverty and material deprivation of children in Austria

EP study on targeted measures to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

Technical support for the development and update of EUROMOD



Thank you very much for your attention!

If you want to know more about our work:

<https://www.euro.centre.org/social-protection-and-inclusion>



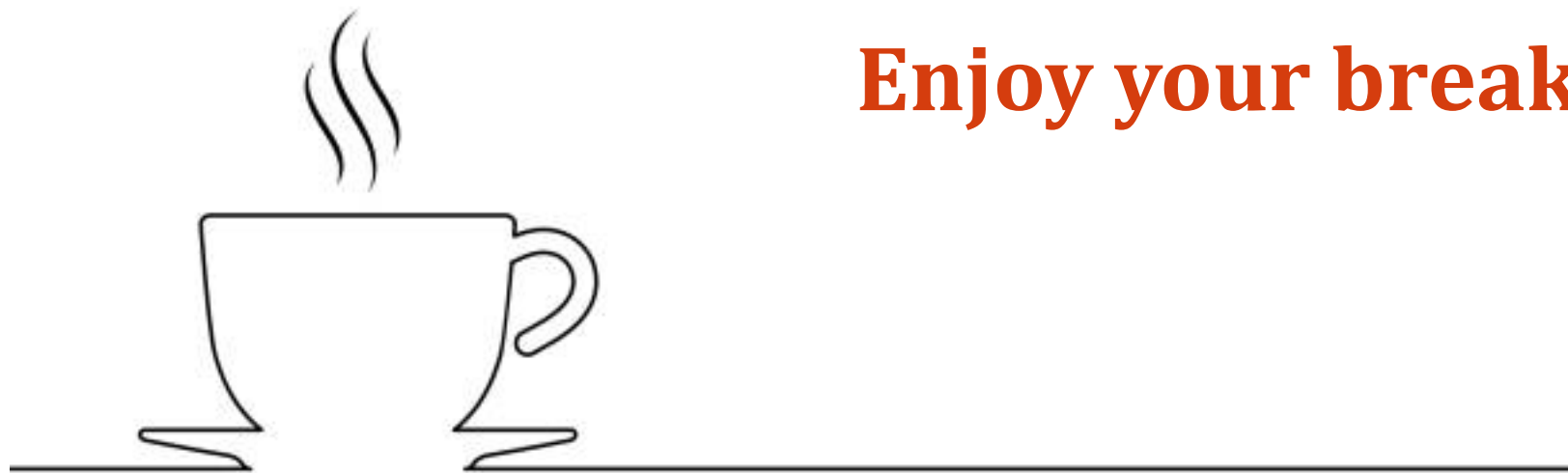
European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

Berggasse 17, 1090 Vienna, Austria

+43 1 319 45 05-0

ec@euro.centre.org

15.45 – 16.15
Enjoy your break!



26 September | 16.15 | Room CR6

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Parallel Session 3 – Chair: Magdi BIRTHA, European Centre

Oleg Barcari

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Moldova

Irene Bertana

European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), Belgium

Michael Fuchs

European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

Michael Herrmann

UNFPA, Türkiye

Jadranka Kaludjerovic

Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognosis, Montenegro



**Please follow us to
the bus stop in front
of UNOV!**

**The bus will leave at
18.15**





Thank you!



European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

Berggasse 17, 1090 Vienna, Austria

+43 1 319 45 05-0

ec@euro.centre.org