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Family Support Policies in European Countries: Challenges and Constraints

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**For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY**



The themes of the presentation:

1. Family support policies: what are we talking about?
2. Challenges and constraints for the welfare state and family policies in Europe
3. Challenges for Romania and other CEE states

1. Family Support Policies:

- What definition?
- What purpose?
- What programmes?
- What role for the state and the civil society?

...there is no simple, clear answer to these questions...

'Classic' family support programmes and issues:

Programmes:

- child daycare services
- maternity and parental leaves
- family/child allowances
- child sick pay and disability supports
- social/orphan pensions

Issues:

- equity, disparities (rich/poor, urban/rural, gender)
- targeting: universal, conditional, means-tested
- care for 0-2 year old children
- low uptake and/or benefit levels (employment record, employer/public attitudes, other factors)
- public-private mix

‘Classic’ functions of family support policies:

- Ease the ‘work-childcare dichotomy’
- Strengthen family income/employment security
- Smooth income over the life-cycle
- Prevent poverty
- Facilitate access to services (e.g. birth registration, health, education)
- Increase family stability and/or social cohesion
- Prevent child separations and/or high risk situations
- Promote equal opportunity/gender equity
- Demographic, pro-natalist considerations

'Rights-based, holistic, child-centered and result-oriented' approaches:

- **Analysis, assessment and action:** family policies need to reflect stability/predictability but also critical review, innovation and adjustment...
- **Rights-based approach to legislative reform and implementation:** does not necessarily mean different programmes often doing the similar things but differently...
- **Holistic approach:** rather than 'programmes' focus on the child in her/his environment, i.e. consider the interplay of a range of 'welfare state' type public interventions in an integrated manner...

Welfare state programmes relevant for families, children and women

Social insurance, labour and social assistance measures:

- unemployment insurance/benefit
- anti-discrimination measures
- active labour market policies
- targeted social assistance
- adult disability and sickness benefits
- old age pensions

Tax and housing policies:

- tax policy measures (tax credits/allowances, family tax systems)
- housing (public/rent, preferential savings and credit programmes)

Welfare state programmes relevant for families, children and women (cont.)

'Classic' family support programmes:

- child daycare services
- maternity and parental leaves
- family/child allowances
- child disability and care benefits
- social/orphan pensions

Education, health and recreation services

- facilities/programmes for different (child) age groups
- support/protection measures (equity, protection considerations but risk of segregation)

Welfare state programmes relevant for families, children and women (cont.)

Social work services:

- family counselling (incl. parenting skills)
- counselling/services for abuse victims
- drop-in centres, family centres, shelters

'Classic' child protections measures:

- adoption (national/international)
- foster care and allowances
- respite care at families
- specialised daycare for children with disabilities
- respite care in residential facilities
- full time residential care (incl. disability)

Reforms: a Human Rights-based approach...

- Direct attention and resources to the poorest, marginalized, and discriminated against
- Foster democratic participation, citizenship, and empowerment of the disenfranchised, women and youth
- Foster integrated solutions to problems of social development and disparities
- Build capacity of the state to assume its obligations and of people to claim their rights
- Demand accountability

Implications of the CRC for public policy:

- Treat children as individuals (“..on the rights of the child”)
- Participation (children, families, service providers)
- Rights are universal (right-holder > citizen) as is responsibility
- Each child has a right to family upbringing, identity, personal dignity as well as to access to social security and services
- The family is the key child rights-agency and provider
- Communities and the state have responsibility to secure support
- The principle of “maximum extent of available resources”
- Accountability (incl. the international community)

UNICEF's working definition on child poverty:

“Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society”

(State of the World's Children, 2005)

2. Europe: policy challenges

- Women's labour force participation rates: diverging trends West/East
- Fertility trends/ageing
- Diverse family forms (single-parent, extended, adoptive etc)
- Growing awareness on disability, incl. learning disabilities
- Digital/multilingual divide
- 'Lost parental generation' in post-transition Eastern Europe
- Minorities, migration
- Growing/persistent inequalities (inc., ed/achievement, health)
- EU enlargement
- The 'European social model' and issues around international competitiveness, labour market flexibility

Constraints

- Public support to reforms (middle class)
- Public budget constraints (public employees, pensions)
- Maastricht criteria (Euro)
- Advice from international financial institutions/markets (CEE)
- Sluggish/volatile economic growth
- Ageing/shrinking/unhealthy/unevenly skilled labour force
- Low attention to Millennium Development Agenda (MDGs)

Issue: 'Investing in child rights' as development strategy?

The 'European Social Model'

- considerable income security
- relatively little poverty
- availability of social services

... is in fact heterogeneous and changing...

... including through

- peer review among countries ('open co-ordination method') and
- decentralisation

Traditional European welfare state models...

- Corporatist, social insurance-based (Continental)
- Liberal-residual welfare model (Anglo-Saxon)
- Social-democratic traditions (Nordic/Scandinavian)
- Family and church-based (Southern European)

... these traditions have lasting implications on ...

- availability and design of family support programmes
- family/child poverty levels

European approaches to family support and early childhood care and education...

Common tendencies

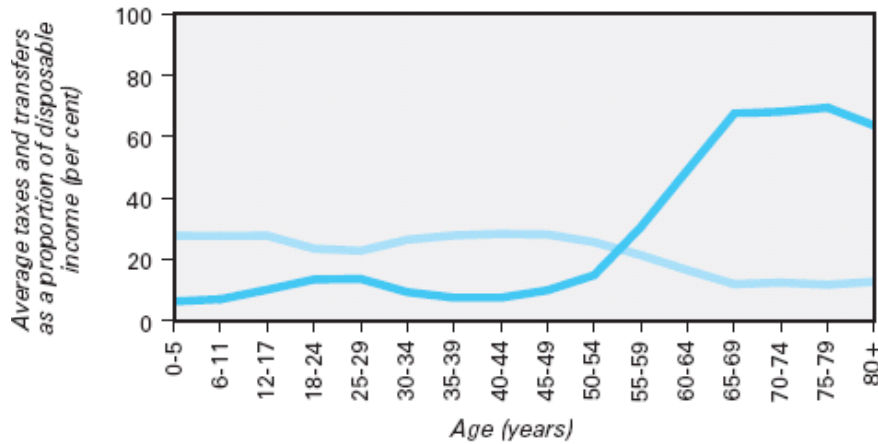
- preschool education (3-5 year olds)
- in many countries longer maternity/parental leaves
- strengthening the role of the father in care ('father's quota')
- child allowances/benefits handed to mothers
- conditioning cash support to categorical criteria/service uptake

Differences

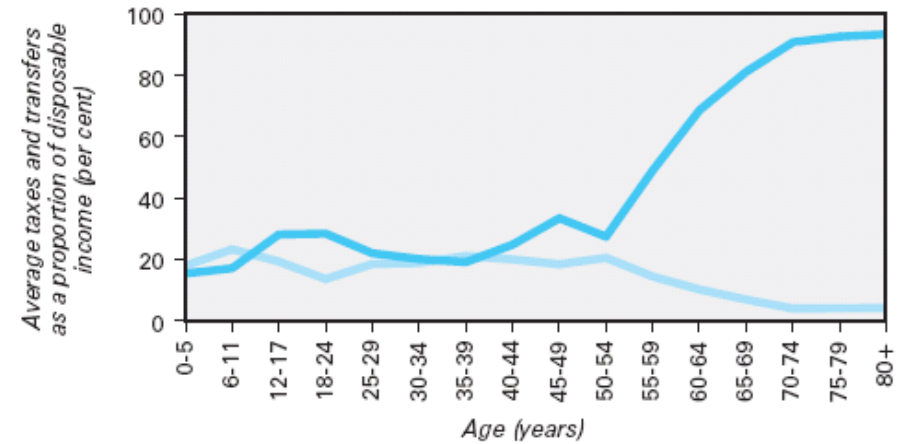
- Neutral support/nursery school model (France)
- Dual system: 0-2 'private commodity', 3-5 'public good' (UK)
- Integrated, comprehensive services (Nordic countries)
- Parental leave-based solutions (Poland, Hungary)

Taxes and cash transfers by age among the poor and total population in two European countries...

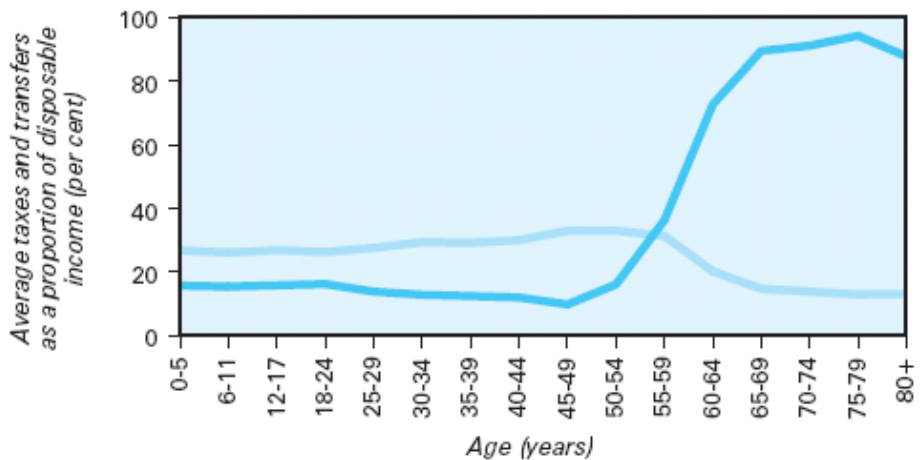
GREECE, Total Population



GREECE, Low Income Population



FRANCE, Total Population



FRANCE, Low Income Population

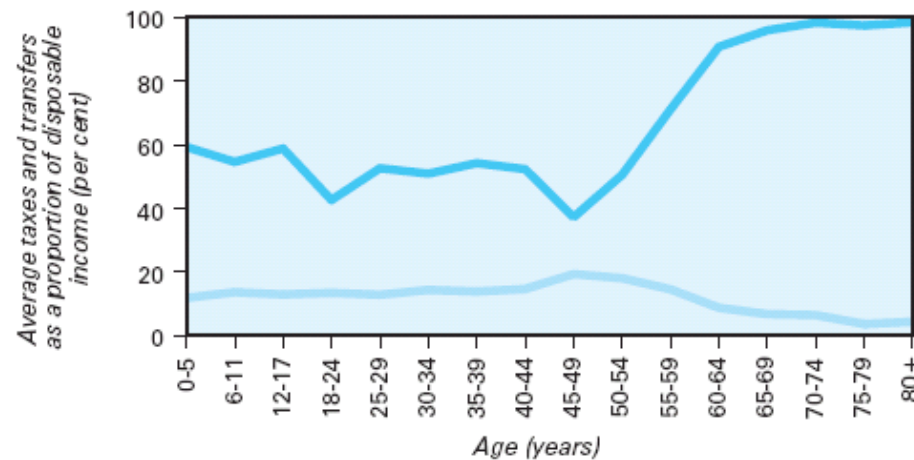
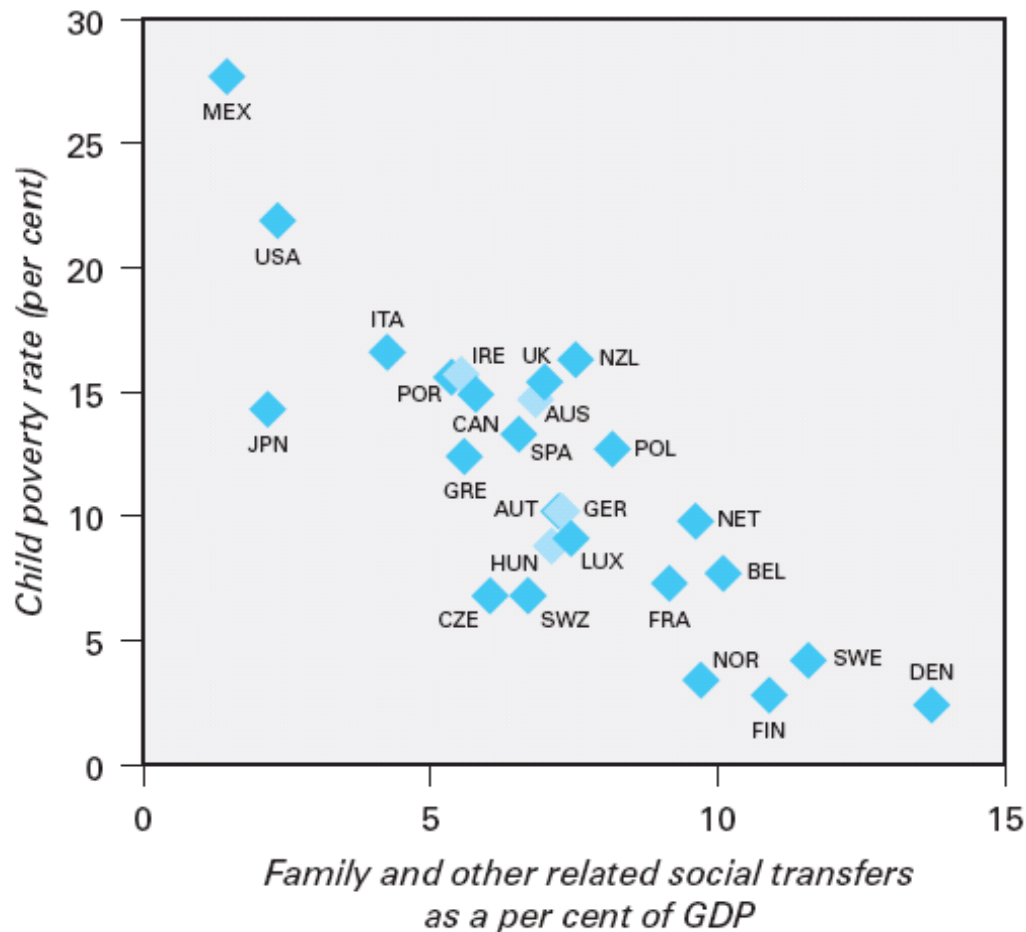


Figure 10 Social transfers relating to family economic security

The graph sets each country's child poverty rate (as in Figure 1) against its level of government social transfers. Social transfers in the graph are those going towards family allowances, disability and sickness benefits, formal day care provision and unemployment insurance. Government expenditure on health and education is not included.



Child poverty and social transfers in OECD countries

Source: *Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005*
Innocenti Report Cards 6,
UNICEF IRC, Florence

Failing social transfers → poverty → health

Probability that a women at age 33
will have *poor health*

no poverty in childhood: 11 %

clear poverty in childhood: 26 %

ODDS 1 : 2

Failing social transfers → poverty → education

Probability that a women at age 33
will have *no qualifications*

no poverty in childhood: 7 %
clear poverty in childhood: 44 %

ODDS 1 : 6

Source: UK Social Survey data from Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1999

Social transfers → poverty → need for protection

Probability that a child will be placed *in care substitute to parental home*

- General population **1:7000**
- Socio-economically deprived families **1:10**

Source: Bebbington and Miles, 1989

Vicious cycles...

→ **Childhood poverty**

Social exclusion, discrimination

Poor education, lifeskills

Poor health

Deprivation of a family upbringing

→ **Adult poverty**

3. Challenges for Romania and other CEE states:

- Sustain progress after January 2007
 - welfare state and the middle class?
 - Ensure ‘trickling down’ rights-based approaches and good practice from child protection services to broader family and social sector policies
 - Civil society
 - Care leavers
- Tackle the root causes of child abandonment: poverty, social exclusion and weak family policies
 - Disparities, discrimination (ethnic minorities)
 - Youth un(stable)employment, (life)skills

3. Challenges... (cont.)

- MDGs:
 - Romania and Bulgaria have the highest U5MR in Europe
 - Education quality and secondary school enrolment
 - Policies to address child disability
 - Migration, remittances
 - Youth and gender issues (including around family formation, employment and participation)

Why the concern?...

Personal, moral and legal commitments

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1947)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)
- European Social Charter, Council of Europe
- National legislations

...why the concern?...

Human development considerations

acting on child poverty impacts on a range of social concerns

- human resources
- gender equity
- child protection
- crime and human environment
- social cohesion

...why the concern?...

Child development considerations

periods of poverty at early age in the lifecycle have lasting impacts on

- absolute deprivation (nutrition, injuries)
- relative deprivation/exclusion (health, education, employment etc.)

UNICEF, applying a human rights framework, supports the State

through:

- Policy analysis that indicates gaps in the fulfillment of children's and women's rights
- Budget analyses that point to shortfalls in and options for raising resources for reducing exclusion and fulfilling rights.
- Legislative reform that promotes application of the CRC, social inclusion and participation
- Public Policy design that advances the fulfillment of children's rights and the reduction of exclusion

UNICEF, applying a human rights framework, supports the State

Contributes to sustainability, credibility and transparency:

- by partnering with governments at both central and local level,
- partnering with civil society to promote participation, monitoring and accountability
- using evidence, analysis, advocacy and partnerships to leverage policies and resources for children's and women's rights

Thank you !

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