
17. Family policies and social inequalities in Central and Eastern Europe: a comparative analysis of Hungary, Poland and Romania between 2005 and 2015

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INTRODUCTION

State interventions generally placed under the header of ‘family policies’ have an uneven impact across class lines and this plainly appears in Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies, which experienced growing inequalities after the fall of communism. This chapter explores family policy developments in Hungary, Poland and Romania, three countries with different, yet comparable welfare state histories, from the perspective of their impact on inequality and child poverty. Our investigation starts at the time of accession to the European Union (EU) (Hungary and Poland in 2004, Romania in 2007), a period marked by relative economic growth and political stability, and goes through the years of the global financial crisis until 2015, when gradual economic recovery was adversely accompanied by intensified nationalist-populist discourses. We contend that in all three countries family policy changes mostly favoured the middle class, while their effects on the situation of socially deprived families with irregular or no employment differed and fluctuated more prominently over time. While nationalistic population policies have been interwoven with family policies in all the three countries, attempts to stigmatize poor families gained emphasis only in Romania and Hungary, often targeting the Roma minority.

We interpret family policies here as cash transfers, subsidies and tax credits directed towards families with dependent children, and services for children below 6 years of age, mainly nurseries and kindergartens. Although we also refer to private and non-governmental organizations, our focus remains on public institutions providing support for families. Concerning the level of analysis, we refer to Kvist (2007) and emphasize the importance of investigating both policy outputs and outcomes. In doing so, we go beyond macro-statistics on spending and scrutinize changes in benefit structures, eligibility conditions and the generosity of benefit amounts.¹

The chapter is organized as follows. First, we provide a synthesis of the state-of-art in family policy analysis related to the CEE region and explain the relevance of our case selection. Second, we analyse the patterns of family policy spending in the three countries as compared to European averages, and recent developments in the most important family policy provisions. Third, we measure the poverty reduction effects of family policies with the help of Eurostat indicators and search for explanations in the national welfare regulations. Special attention is paid to child poverty, the situation of lone parents and large families. Finally, we outline our main findings and point out continuities and recent, potentially path-shifting changes.

OVERVIEW ON CEE FAMILY POLICY RESEARCH AND OUR THREE CASES OF 'FAMILIALISM'

In comparative welfare state analysis, CEE countries have for a long time been either grouped together as 'post-communist' welfare states or clustered alongside older welfare capitalisms (Deacon, 2000). While acknowledging similarities stemming from the early years of social insurance and social assistance programmes from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, as well as the somewhat homogenizing effects of the communist rule, contemporary authors have tried to point out a range of differences among post-communist welfare states (Ferge, 2008; Cerami and Vanhuysse, 2009; Szikra and Tomka, 2009; Aidukaite, 2011; Romano, 2014; Kuitto 2016) and in the more narrow field of family policies (Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Szikra and Szelewa, 2009; Inglot et al., 2013; Javornik, 2014; Saxonberg, 2014; Hasková and Saxonberg, 2015).

The strong embeddedness of nationalistic sentiments has roots in their history of ethno-nation state building and the powerful emphasis on the 'nation' even under state-socialism, and have recently been on the rise especially in Hungary and Poland, with populist right-wing parties in power. Family and population policies are at the centre of the governing programmes of these conservative parties (in power in Hungary since 2010 and in Poland since 2015), endorsing pronatalist measures and rewards for large families. Similar tendencies remain marginal to mainstream politics in Romania. Instead, widespread prejudice against the Roma ethnic minority and concerns over high fertility among the poorest segments of the population (discursively associated with the 'Tsigane' stereotype) leave large families systematically disadvantaged by social policy regulations. In both Romania and Hungary, poor families in general and the Roma minority in particular are often the target of discourses blaming the 'undeserving poor', and face disciplinary conditionings and other mechanisms of 'unfavourable inclusion' (Sen, 2000, p. 28), or even exclusion from welfare rights (Szalai, 2012; Raț, 2013).

The neoliberal discourse largely discredited ideas of social solidarity and replaced it with 'the changed welfare paradigm' of individual responsibility in post-communist countries (Ferge, 1997; Popescu, 2004). This was reflected in the very low social spending on families and children in Romania and Poland until 2015. Hungarian family policy (as opposed to other fields of welfare) resisted any significant cuts, except from a short-lived austerity-package in the mid-1990s (see also Haney, 2002). The coincidence between the emergence of the Lisbon agenda and the timing of EU accession of CEE countries put pressure on governments to address the problem of poverty and social exclusion, while 'activation' (mother's employment), gender equality and work-life balance challenged the old structure of family policies. As argued elsewhere (e.g., Inglot et al., 2013), domestic responses to EU expectations were largely shaped by the legacies of well-entrenched family policies, and the different traditions of combining means-tested, universal and insurance-based benefits and services.

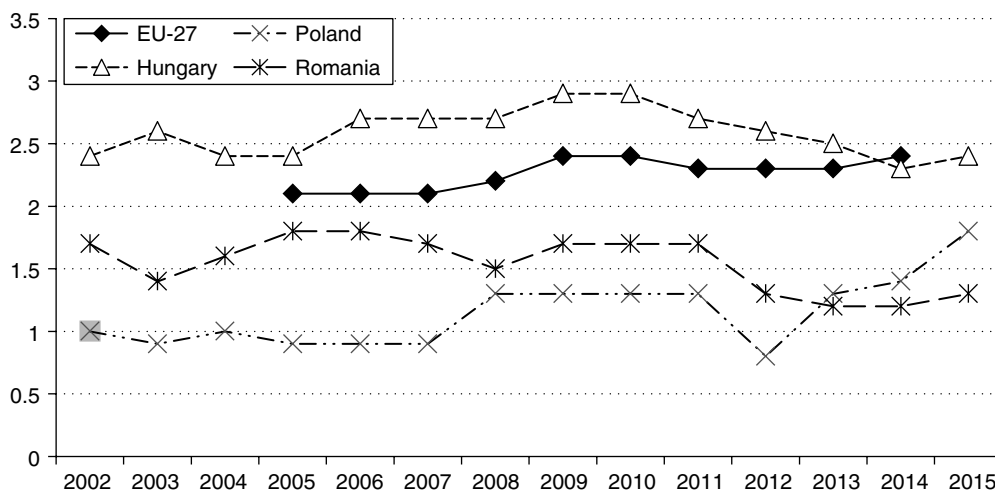
The gender emancipation project of state socialist regimes channelled women into paid work and widened opportunities for education and professional carrier development, often more than in some of the capitalist democracies of the time (Fodor, 2002). However, the quest to dismantle patriarchal relations within the family and to radically de-familialize care work remained far behind the communist thesis of equality and socializing the costs of labour reproduction (e.g., Pascall and Kwak, 2005). Since the fall

of state socialism CEE countries have followed different paths in combining familialistic and individualistic policies (Daly, 2010) and in mixing state support with reliance on the family or the market (Glass and Fodor, 2007; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Javornik, 2014). Romania and Poland embraced more eagerly the European agenda of women's employment, while Hungary remained on the conservative side of supporting mothers as domestic care providers.

Besides important similarities, family policy traditions are quite distinct in the three countries and precisely this difference makes the comparison worthwhile. Hungary pioneered child care services in the late nineteenth century (Szikra, 2011) and provided generous cash transfers and leave schemes for families from the late 1960s. Comparative statistics depict Hungary as among the highest spending countries on family policies within the EU in the past decades, and not even the financial crisis reduced the government's commitment to support families from the state budget. Triggered by political concerns for declining fertility, the Hungarian state provided financial incentives for parents (mothers) to care for their children within the family, setting forth a case of 'explicit familialism' (Lewis, 2001; Leitner, 2003; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Javornik, 2014).

Poland, on the other hand, has long been a laggard in family policy spending (Inglot, 2008), yet consistently redistributes income towards families in the lowest income quintiles, and especially lone parents and large families (Balcerzak-Paradowska et al., 2003). The central state refrained from strong intervention into family life and child care arrangements, while symbolically praising the family and motherhood. Thus, Poland can be regarded as a case of 'implicit familialism', where the state retains a subsidiary role to parents' child-rearing duties (Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Javornik, 2014). However, a sharp decline in fertility and vast out-migration after EU integration called for better family policy programmes to be put in place. Cash transfers for families with children and public child care services picked up by 2008 and have been expanding since then, raising the question of whether we are witnessing a departure from 'implicit familialism' towards a more 'explicit' or even 'optional' approach.

Similar to Poland, Romania has been facing serious problems of child poverty, especially in rural areas. The communist regime built a relatively large-scale system of child care services, yet crèches and kindergartens remained underfunded and, after the aggressive measures of coercive pronatalism introduced in 1966, overcrowded (Kligman, 1998; Popescu, 2006). Family allowance, while rather generous for urban workers, excluded altogether the large number of agricultural cooperative members until 1977. Enforced pronatalism and the very low living standards in the 1980s increased the number of children placed in residential institutions, and their appalling situation demanded a prompt reform in child protection on the road to EU accession (Popescu, 2006). Romania thus concentrated after 1990 on overcoming the legacy of child neglect and made efforts to decrease child poverty and (in stark opposition to Hungary and Poland) to discourage families from having more than three children. Rapidly decreasing fertility and growing out-migration led to policy responses that favoured working parents and offered generous earnings-related child care leave benefits for the middle class. Public efforts to subsidize child care services increased and parents' early return to work from child care leave were rewarded with a novel monthly benefit. Thus, Romania might be regarded as a weak case of 'optional familism', applied selectively only for parents with regular employment.



Source: Authors' graph based on data provided by Eurostat (2017).

Figure 17.1 *The evolution of expenditures on family benefits as a percentage of GDP in Hungary, Poland and Romania between 2002 and 2015 (without tax credits)*

PATTERNS OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURES AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FAMILY POLICY PROVISIONS

The evolution of family policy expenditures as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) (Figure 17.1), together with the structure of spending according to the countries' targeting of low-income families via means-testing, offer preliminary indicators for our analysis. Hungary has traditionally been very generous in its spending (2.4 per cent in 2005, reaching 2.9 per cent in 2009), yet this has declined since 2010 (dropping back to 2.4 per cent in 2015). Means-tested benefits aimed at tackling income inequalities between families represented only 4 per cent of total spending in 2012 (0.1 per cent of GDP). However, data on Hungary can be misleading, as they do not include the major source of increase in the disposable income, namely, the boost to family tax reliefs since 2010 that amounted to 0.67 per cent of GDP by 2013. Tax reliefs included family policy spending increases over 3 per cent of GDP. As no upper limit to the tax reliefs applies and no tax refund for those on low income exists, an important share of state support is channelled towards higher income families.

In contrast, total family policy spending has been traditionally low in Poland, and the largest share was targeted towards low-income families (66 per cent in 2005 and 55 per cent in 2012). Between 2002 and 2007, family policy spending accounted for only 1 per cent of the GDP, while between 2008 and 2011 it stagnated at around 1.3 per cent of the GDP. After a sudden decrease in 2012, family policy spending increased at 1.8 per cent of the GDP by 2015, fostered by Poland's relative economic prosperity unharmed by the global financial crisis. Tax credits for families were also adopted in 2007, and gradually extended later, with an upward redistribution towards wealthy families (in a similar vein to the Hungarian case), amounting to approximately 0.4 per cent of Polish GDP in 2010,

contributing to 1.7 per cent spending on family policy cash transfers in this country. With the remarkable boost of family-related benefits in 2016, total family policy spending is likely to significantly increase.

Within the same period, Romanian family policy spending fluctuated, with slightly more generous time spans during the years of economic growth and EU accession, but never exceeding 1.8 per cent of GDP. Between 2011 and 2013 the overall tendency was that of a decline, with a historical low of 1.2 per cent of GDP in 2014, followed by a slight increase at 1.3 per cent of GDP in 2015. Similar to Hungary, means-tested benefits account for a small segment of total spending on family-related cash transfers – 7 per cent cf. 0.1 per cent of GDP in 2012. Tax reliefs are higher for low-wage earners and cut entirely for parents earning above the average gross income. This may decrease inequalities somewhat, but the financial gain remains modest, smaller than the value of the universal child allowance.

The evolution of spending in terms of PPS (Purchasing Power Standards) per capita portrays a similar general picture for the three countries. Whereas Poland and Romania both register low amounts of spending, Hungary reaches around 2.5 times higher values, but still remains well below the EU-15 average (Eurostat, 2017).

In order to analyse family policy outputs, it is crucial to go beyond simple statistics on spending. The actual expansion or retrenchment of family policies should be determined at the level of eligibility conditions and generosity of benefit amounts. The most significant form of cash benefits has long been *family allowance* in all the three countries. It served primarily as a tool to increase family incomes and prevent child poverty. In Hungary, family allowance has progressively increased according to the number of children even under state socialism, while the amount has been higher in the case of single parents, typically lone mothers, and also for disabled children. All these important features were kept unchanged from 1990, and the benefit was paid out to every family with children under 18 (21 in the case of university students), with the exception of a short period between 1996 and 1998, when it became means-tested. A major change took place in 2006 when the benefit was doubled, as suggested in the newly formed National Program to Combat Child Poverty (2006) under the Socialist-Liberal coalition. With this increase, means-tested family-related benefits as well as family tax reliefs were (nearly) stopped and thus effectively ‘merged’ into one, universally available family allowance (Darvas and Mózer, 2004). After the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, the minority Socialist government did not directly cut this benefit, but froze the allowance, which has not been increased since then. The Conservative coalition elected in 2010 (and re-elected in 2014) embraced a completely different understanding of family policies and has directed resources to ‘working families’ instead of *all* families. To this aim, spending on family tax allowance, utilized most effectively by families with average income or above, was boosted by over ten times, from 0.05 per cent to 0.67 per cent of GDP, while universal family allowance was not indexed at all. Thus, there has been a visible shift from universal cash transfers to fiscal welfare, benefiting better-off families. Since 2010, approximately 10 per cent of formerly eligible children were ‘pushed out’ by decreasing the age of compulsory education from 18 to 16 years and the strict conditioning of family allowance on school attendance.

Poland registered significant upgrading of the family allowance between 2005 and 2014, when it was eventually doubled. Still, the increase was not reflected in the total spending given the decline in birth rates, considerable out-migration from the country and

the relatively low eligibility threshold to this historically means-tested benefit. Similarly, *becikowe*, the one-time birth grant, maintained its value, but overall spending decreased as the number of recipients dropped. In 2016, the new right-wing government led by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) made the family allowance universal for all families with two or more children, and substantially increased its amount. If sustainable, this step marks a path-shifting change in Poland.

In Romania, corresponding to the family allowance is the universal child allowance, a constitutional right granted to every child below 18 years of age (and up to 19 for those in secondary education). Even if the amounts have been modest, spending accounts for one-third of the social protection budget, and was eventually boosted 2.4 times between 2005 and 2010, as the allowance for children below the age of 2 significantly increased in 2007. This upgrading should be interpreted by taking into account the lack of widely available paid child care leave due to strict eligibility conditions related to the work record, as we explain later in this chapter. Family allowance has a means-tested top-up for low-income families (in place since 2003), with higher amounts for lone-parent families. Similar to Hungary, the benefit is strictly conditioned on school attendance, which results in low uptake among families from the most severely deprived, marginalized settlements, where access to school is difficult and child labour frequent. Birth-grants had been available between 2001 and 2010, but phased out through crisis-led austerity measures. In 2015 the amount of the universal child allowance doubled again, now reaching approximately €20 per child per month.

Regulations on *maternity leave* are similar in all three countries: high replacement rates ranging between 70 per cent and 100 per cent of previous earnings and 24 to 26 weeks of leave. Fathers' rights nonetheless differ. In Hungary, merely five days of paternity leave are provided for fathers and approximately one-quarter of fathers take it. In Romania, the same five days leave can be supplemented, since 1999 with ten more days, on the condition that fathers take a training course on infants' care. In Poland, paternity leave introduced in 2003 offers two weeks. This comparison shows that the two countries that have long been laggards in family policy are now more open to change than Hungary with a longer and more 'sticky' history of conservative family policies with more emphasis on motherly care.

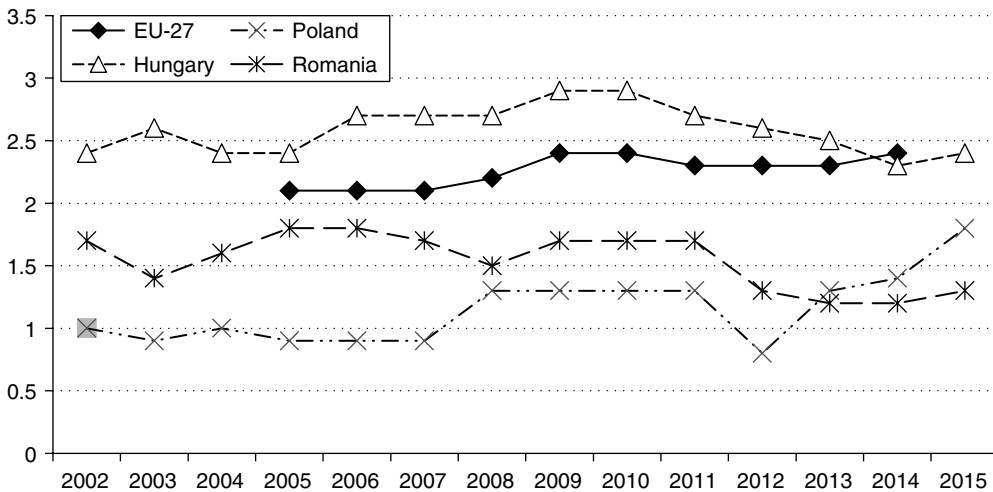
Parental and child care leaves and related benefits are typically earnings-related and overwhelmingly taken by mothers in all three countries, but their length and availability for non-wage earners differ. In Hungary, the earnings-related paid child care leave, lasting until a child's second birthday, is backed by a universal, flat-rate provision of a much smaller value, granted until a child's third birthday. The latter is utilized by parents with no work record as well as by parents who have been taking earnings-related leave and want to extend leave until the third birthday of their children. Importantly, both types of child care leaves count as contributory years in terms of social insurance. Since 2015, parents returning earlier to the formal labour market have been able to fully maintain their benefits in the case of both leaves, until their children's second and third birthdays, respectively. The system of child care leaves also includes the symbolic construction of 'motherhood as a profession' with the possibility for mothers of three or more children to receive a 'homemaker' leave until their youngest child reaches 8 years of age.

Poland offers earnings-related paid leave only until a child's first birthday, while for the second year a means-tested, flat-rate benefit might be claimed by those with the proper work record. Since 2016, Polish parents lacking a work record have been able

to apply for a flat-rate child care benefit, again a breakthrough in Polish family policy development.

In Romania, earnings-related paid child care leave lasts until a child’s second birthday, but early return to work is rewarded with a generous benefit (‘stimulant’), extended in 2016 until a child’s third birthday. While some categories of non-wage earners qualify for the minimum value of the benefit (students, persons on sickness leave or registered unemployed still receiving insurance-based benefits), the majority of irregular workers (two out of ten women in Romania) are still not eligible.

The structuring of child care leave benefits favours higher earners in all three countries, even if their financing mechanism is not insurance based per se. The rather costly measure of lengthy job-return bonuses in Romania and more recently in Hungary shows the tension between the traditionalist idea of keeping the popular long paid child care leaves, on the one hand, and giving in to (internal and external) pressures to increase employment of mothers, on the other. Between 2005 and 2015, women’s employment rate (aged 20–64 years) increased from 55 to 62.2 per cent in Hungary, from 58 to 61.4 per cent in Poland, while in Romania it stayed at around 56 per cent (Eurostat, 2017). Importantly for estimating the demand for child care services, the share of part-time employment and fixed-term contracts remained much lower than in the ‘old’ member states, and registered a relatively modest increase during the years of the financial crisis, in 2009–11 (e.g., KSH, 2013). Consequently, women from new member states typically have full-time jobs and work more hours than women from the EU-15. As Figure 17.2 illustrates, the employment rate of mothers with three or more children, the youngest below the age of 6, has been significantly lower in Hungary (around 20 per cent until 2010, then a rise to 28 per cent in 2015) than in Poland (50 per cent) and Romania (45 per cent). The explanation resides largely in the construction of long child care leaves keeping mothers at home. The amount



Source: Authors’ graph based on data provided by Eurostat (2017).

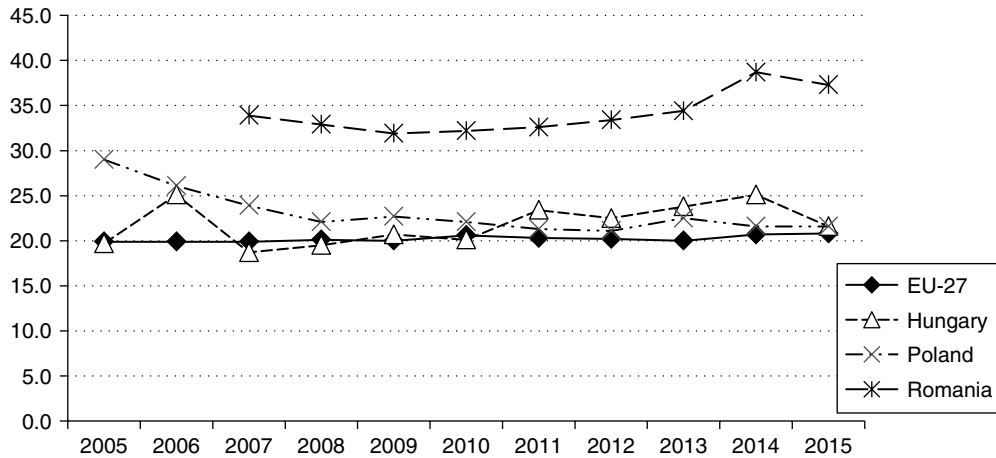
Figure 17.2 Employment rate of mothers aged 20–49 with three or more children, youngest below 6

of flat-rate leaves is, however, set at a very low level at 90 euros per month, approximately one-quarter of the minimum wage, not indexed since 2008. Consequently, while diminishing future prospects of a return to employment, flat-rate long leaves increase mothers' economic dependence in Hungary, creating a peculiar form of 'motherhood penalty' on the labour market.

Besides cash transfers, access to subsidized *child care services* plays a major role in shaping inequalities, promoting mothers' employment and alleviating the long-term effects of deprivation in children's life trajectories (see also Chapter 8 by Rostgaard in this volume). Since 2005, all three countries have progressed in terms of coverage of child care services, paralleled by a shift of emphasis from 'care' to 'early education'. In Hungary, 15 per cent of children below the age of 3 were enrolled in nurseries (mostly in cities), and 90 per cent of children between 3 and 6 years of age attended kindergarten by 2015 (Eurostat, 2017). Albeit in Poland nurseries did not have a significant role for a long time, their number increased five times between 2005 and 2014 (GUS, 2015, p. 172), and nursery enrolment increased from 3 per cent in 2005 to 6 per cent in 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). Similar to Hungary, services diversified and demand for them increased, yet kindergarten attendance remained around 72 per cent (UNICEF, 2016). The alternative of contracting private nannies, now subsidized by the Polish state, proved to be popular for the middle class (above 8000 contracted nannies in 2014; see GUS, 2015, p. 175). Romania gradually improved its child care infrastructure with kindergartens available even in remote rural areas and attendance growing at 84 per cent in 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). The availability of nurseries remained below demand even in the larger urban centres, and enrolments registered 3.5 per cent in 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). Since 2006, employers may offer crèche vouchers. Importantly for the lowest income segments of the population, and similar to a Hungarian programme in existence until 2016, a means-tested kindergarten attendance grant of around €12 per child per month was introduced in 2015.²

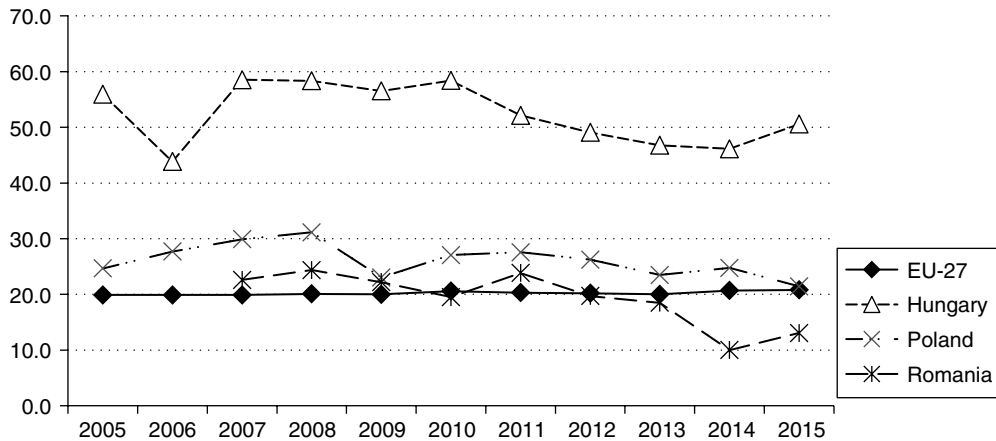
CHILD POVERTY IN RELATION TO FAMILY POLICY OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Decreasing child poverty³ has been a common quest of the EU countries since the first national action plans for social inclusion in 2002, setting ambitious targets for 2010 (see also Chapter 7 by Bradshaw and Chapter 23 by Gornick and Nell in this volume). By now it is clear that expectations to reach these targets may fail even for 2020 (Figure 17.3). Between 2007 and 2010, Hungary was still among the leading EU countries in terms of child poverty reduction (Romano, 2014). However, between 2010 and 2014 the relative poverty reduction of welfare transfers for children below 16 years old, roughly translated as the share of children who avoid poverty due the fact that their families receive social benefits, declined from above 60 per cent to 47 per cent (Figure 17.4), with immediate negative consequences for child poverty rates. Poverty reduction improved in 2015. This progress was, however, not due to increased benefits directed to the poor (these have been halted since 2008), but a result of the extension of public works programmes that provide a higher income to long-term unemployed parents than meagre social assistance. In Poland, child poverty reduction effectiveness fell sharply in 2009 and 2013, but each time it rose again and fluctuated around 45–47 per cent.



Source: Authors' graph based on data provided by Eurostat (2017).

Figure 17.3 The evolution of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children below 6 years old



Source: Authors' graph based on data provided by Eurostat (2017).

Figure 17.4 The evolution of relative poverty reduction of social transfers (excluding pensions) for children below 6 years old

Romania was among the poorest performers, with only around 45 per cent relative child poverty reduction that decreased below 38 per cent in 2014 due to widening of the median poverty gap from 33 per cent in 2012 to 44 per cent in 2015 (see Eurostat, 2017). In comparison, Eurostat (2017) reported a 22 per cent median poverty gap for children below 16 years old in the cases of both Hungary and Poland. Similar to Hungary,

Romania improved its poverty rate reduction performance by 2015, partly by upgrading family benefits, partly by increasing wages.

In Poland, the tendency to increase and then halt the effectiveness in child poverty reduction appeared in the context of the expansion and indexation of family benefits, as discussed above. In Hungary, cuts in the means-tested benefits (Mózer et al., 2015) and a fall in the real value of universal benefits (Farkas and Ferge, 2014; Scharle and Szikra, 2015) since 2009, and continuing after the financial crisis, resulted in decline. Both in Romania and Hungary, the strict conditioning of means-tested benefits on school attendance penalizes poor families for the structural barriers they face. It also perpetuates the derogatory image that being a poor parent means being an 'irresponsible' parent, who should be foremost controlled and disciplined by the state. In this respect, Romanian regulations resemble the Hungarian Family Protection Act of 2011, which included the explicit aim to only promote 'responsible' child bearing, referring to the exclusion of families who did not comply with certain behavioural norms.

Besides analysing family policy outcomes in terms of child poverty reduction in general, it is important to scrutinize the situations of different types of vulnerable families, who face higher risks of poverty, such as one-parent and large families with three or more children. The welfare of single parent families, overwhelmingly consisting of lone mothers, can also be regarded as a 'test' of state support for independent households led by women (Orloff, 2006). Despite largely differing welfare efforts in the three countries, there is no significant difference among lone-parent families, with around one-third facing the risk of poverty as of 2014 (Eurostat, 2017). This figure is actually close to the EU average, with some convergence of poverty rates in Hungary and Romania between 2012 and 2015 due to an increase of poverty rates in Hungary and a pronounced decrease in Romania. Potential explanatory factors for the improvement in Romania may reside outside of the welfare state: mothers' higher employment rates, remittances sent home by relatives working abroad, or the better educational-professional position of lone parents (and especially mothers) that allows them to live independently.

In the case of families with three or more children we can observe a great difference between Poland and Hungary, on the one hand, with approximately 34–35 per cent of large families living at risk of poverty, and Romania, on the other hand, where the vast majority of such families lived in poverty in the first half of the current decade: 60.6 per cent in 2013, worsening to 73.1 per cent in 2014. Eurostat data also point to the failure of relative poverty reduction for large families in Romania, with less than 10 per cent safeguarded from income poverty through state transfers during recent years. Following upgrading of the family allowance and its means-tested components, this situation might slightly improve from 2016. In Hungary, despite a significant decline caused by the decrease of family allowance in real values, poverty reduction in the particular case of large families still seems significantly high, at 45 per cent in 2014. This is due especially to the positive discrimination of families with three or more children in terms of tax relief, parental leave as well as family allowance. Poland shows a reduced level of poverty reduction for large families (from 28 per cent in 2010 to 22 per cent in 2014) that might have been caused by the shift to fiscal welfare. This situation is, however, expected to change very soon, following the adoption of the generous 500+ program in 2016.

CONCLUSIONS

During the last decade, family policies in Hungary, Poland and Romania have been on the move towards selectively upgrading state provisions, but their historically entrenched pathways are still visible. Shifts towards greater reliance on fiscal measures (through strengthening tax credits for families with children), greater gender equality (child care leaves also available for fathers), subsidies for mothers' early return to work and the diversification of child care options occurred with different emphases and timing in our three countries. One important conclusion of our chapter is that most reforms favoured middle-class families, especially in the post-crisis years, as these reforms strengthened earnings-relatedness and fiscal welfare. In Poland, the extension and increase of family allowance (500+ programme) and paid child care leave in 2016 to better-off families represented a turning away from the legacy of 'implicit familism' to more 'explicit' support. Preference for state-subsidized private options is also characteristic of this country. In Hungary, tax reliefs as well as generous earnings-related leaves lead to increased redistribution towards the better-off. Romania, after a brief interlude in the years of the global financial crisis, also increased the earnings-relatedness of leaves and upgraded the benefit for early return to work.

At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, low-income families with irregular or no employment remained adversely included or straightforwardly excluded from some of the mainstream family policy programmes. They are not entitled to paid child care leave in Romania, and receive low flat-rate benefits in Hungary and Poland. Family allowance became stigmatizing in Hungary and Romania with newly applied behavioural controls, which often exclude the most vulnerable children from eligibility. Despite a recent increase in the values of the family allowance in Romania, they have remained much below European standards.

The analysis of the influence of state transfers on child poverty revealed that, despite maintaining its historically high spending on family policies, Hungary decreased its poverty reduction effectiveness, while Poland slightly improved it. If recent changes are maintained by the Polish government, they might have a profound positive effect on tackling child poverty. In Romania, child poverty reduction deteriorated in the years of the global financial crisis, and changes after 2015 might only bring some modest improvement. Varying support for large families depicts divergent views of pronatalism: while Romanian regulations contain disincentives for raising more than four children and hardly ameliorate the risk of poverty in the case of large families, Poland and Hungary grant more generous support, which helps them avoid impoverishment. Strict conditionings on school attendance in Hungary and Romania often fail to reach their purpose and, instead, provide discursive devices for blaming parents who face multiple deprivation, and ultimately pose barriers in combating child poverty and further deepen the inequalities in these countries.

NOTES

- * We are grateful for Tomasz Ingot's generous and valuable input on the Polish case, as well as for our engaging and highly rewarding collaboration on comparative family policy research that started in 2009. All potential errors belong to us.

1. Comparative information on social policy schemes in various European countries is provided, for example, by the Mutual Information System on Social Protection (MISSOC) under the European Commission, see <http://www.missoc.org> (accessed March 2017). In the narrower field of family policies, the OECD Family Policy Database offers useful information on the OECD area: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> (accessed March 2017). For the present study, however, we relied on national sources, as they are more detailed and up to date.
2. The promotion of the law was preceded by the success of a similar programme implemented by the non-governmental organization Ovidiu Ro in rural areas in several counties, in villages with large shares of impoverished children, many of them ethnic Roma. The preamble of the law refers to this programme (see Law 248/2015). This can be seen as a case of scaling-up a local programme to the national level.
3. In this chapter, we measured poverty as income below the at-risk-of-poverty monetary threshold used by Eurostat and set at 60 per cent of the national median income per equivalent person. The equivalence scale applied by Eurostat follows the modified OECD scale and weights every adult (except for the first adult in the household) by 0.5 and every child below the age of 14 by 0.3. This methodology underestimates poverty in the case of families with children whenever a substantive part of the family income is spent on food and other basic non-durable goods, as it happens in CEE countries. Eurostat regularly reports poverty measures also based on the AROPE approach, which includes alongside monetary poverty material deprivation and low work intensity. For details on the construction of the AROPE indicator, see the web page of Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion (accessed March 2017).

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