

Annual Conference of the Research Committee on Poverty, Social Welfare and Social Policy (RC19),  
International Sociological Association  
University of Florence, Italy  
September 6-8, 2007

## **SAFETY NETS IN LATIN AMERICA: TARGETING AND UNIVERSALISM?**

Luis Moreno  
Spanish National Research Council (CSIC, Madrid)

### **(Abstract)**

The shortcomings of welfare strategies in Latin America based upon the extension of contributory entitlements<sup>1</sup> have stimulated fresh discussions concerning targeting and universalism in the provision of safety nets of social protection. The paper's main thrust deals with the possible articulation of conditional transfer policies as the means to advance basic universalism. Newly implemented means-tested programmes for poverty reduction (*programas de transferencia condicionados*) are main objects of study under scrutiny throughout the paper.<sup>2</sup>

The first section of the paper deals with historical experiences and reviews debates concerning targeting and universalism in Western Europe during the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> This is meant to provide with theoretical grounding to subsequent analyses carried out in the second section of the paper on the ongoing situation in Latin America. The feasibility of promoting the implementation of the *programas de transferencia condicionados* is put in contrast to the desirability of facilitating social inclusion.

The third section of the paper discusses whether a combination of targeting and universalism favours, or otherwise, the promotion of social citizenship in the Latin America sub-continent, where inequality ranks highest in the world. A more instrumental question is also addressed on the eventuality of transforming means-tested programmes into universal benefit schemes. Conclusions are put forward concerning those groups and categories (children, elderly, young mothers) which ought to be prioritised in the medium-term social policy making process.

The paper will aim at integrating theoretical perspectives and debates in countries of advanced welfare capitalism with those originated in the less-developed Latin-American region. Data is drawn from international organisation (ECLAC; ILO, UNDP) and national studies (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico).

---

<sup>1</sup> Just around 40% of Latin Americans have access to the Social Security benefits and services. Mean rates of informal jobs are close to 50%. Only 20% of informal employees qualify to some programmes of social protection.

<sup>2</sup> Such as *Jefes de Hogar* (Argentina), *Bolsa-Familia* (Brazil), *Chile Solidario*, and *Oportunidades* (Mexico).

<sup>3</sup> References are made to the Korpi-Le Grand controversy.