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Social Assistance Developments and Means-Tested Minimum Income Protection in the Developed World 1990-2005

Abstract: This paper draws attention to low-income targeting and various programs explicitly designed to alleviate poverty in industrialized democracies. Three questions relevant for current social reform debate are addressed. First, the extent to which minimum income protection has suffered from the stagnation and decline of welfare states in recent decades? Second, whether the social agenda in the Europeanization of welfare states marks a distinct European path in the development of low-income targeting? Third, if it is possible to observe certain gendered dimensions in the structure of minimum income protection, whereby women are treated differently than men? The empirical analyses are based on new and unique institutional data from the *Social Assistance and Minimum Income Protection Interim Dataset*. It is shown that last-resort arrangements for the poor and the needy have suffered from retrenchment during the last one and a half decade, although extensive cross-national differences do exist. There is some evidence of convergence in benefit levels among the European countries, but there is no clear evidence of gender inequalities embodied in benefit standards.