

**Annual Conference of the Research Committee (RC19)  
International Sociological Association**

**Social Policy in a Globalizing World : Developing a South-North Dialogue**

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**Social Policies facing New Social Risks: lone parents from Northern to Southern Europe**

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a comparative research about poverty and social exclusion of lone-parent families and the evolution of social policies facing these risks in 13 European countries<sup>1</sup> including Northern and Southern countries and a number of New member states and Candidate countries. The research has been financed by the EC DGV Employment and Social Affairs<sup>2</sup>, in order to identify the reasons behind higher poverty risks faced by lone-parent households and the obstacles lone-parent households are confronted with in order to gain a foothold in the labour market as well as to gain access to other factors of social inclusion. Aim of the research bid was to examine how family support systems - policies, institutional arrangements and practices – succeed in transforming the gender pattern of poverty in different contexts.

Lone-parent families have been considered a litmus test of the maturity and generosity of welfare systems in the five welfare regimes we consider<sup>3</sup>, insofar their social protection derives from the emergence of the issue of gendered poverty in public discourse and from a growing capacity of the states of covering not only the Old social risks of the Fordist compromise but the New social risks deriving from flexible labour markets and the vanishing of the male breadwinner model. Our data collection concerning policies, based on national flash reports and vignettes is aimed at locating each single country of the sample and the five main families of welfare regimes along a continuum of good-to-insufficient recasting of the welfare state in order to cover new social risks. This mainly involves family policies, active labour-market policies, support for lifelong learning and re-training, socialization of care work, care services, support of the cost of children and conciliation policies.

Our analysis of the existing policies directly or indirectly addressing lone parents in our thirteen countries substantially confirms our hypothesis, roughly following the order of the five welfare regimes; but it is not a mere question of more or less mature and generous welfare systems, so much as a *cultural change* - one which not all our countries have yet reached - in which the historical cleavage between 'deserving' widows and 'undeserving' single and divorced mothers is being overcome: thus, in keeping with the origins of every social policy, the consequences of divorce, of abandonment, of breaking a cohabitation are no longer conceived as private individual risks but are taken out of the private sphere and granted protection from society

The best indicator we could identify of a turning point in such transformations in many countries - belonging to all welfare regimes - is an early sensitivity emerging to the fact that every child lacking one of the parents living with him/her faces the same risks as an orphan, irrespective of whether the other parent is still be living and that such a child should enjoy the same rights to social support. This kind of *cultural achievement* opens the space for a qualitative change, often involving some steps from work-related social security to at least potentially, universalist measures.

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<sup>1</sup> Norway, Denmark, Poland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Slovenia

<sup>2</sup> Tender VT/2005/018.

<sup>3</sup> 1. Scandinavian countries and France, 2. Liberal Anglo-Saxon countries and Netherlands, 3. Germany, 4. Transition countries, 5. Mediterranean countries and Bulgaria