

10. The evolution of social policy research in Central and Eastern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The fall of the communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) since 1989 has opened a plethora of welfare state and social policy research in this part of the world. Welfare state theories, typologies, and approaches excluded from their analysis former socialist countries, which had a rather different historical and economic development as compared to the capitalist democracies. Nevertheless, the former socialist countries had extensive social policies, which, in some cases, were just as developed as those in the West (Inglot, 2008; Aidukaite, 2009; Kuitto, 2016). After the fall of the various communist regimes, many of the CEE countries went through dramatic changes and all of them have experienced social policy reform. This chapter aims to review the evolution of welfare state and social policy research in the CEE region since the 1990s across several selected social policy areas, highlighting the current state of affairs and presenting suggestions for future research.

The focus is on primarily comparative research carried out in the CEE region, which includes ten EU member states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia). These countries form three more or less similar clusters distinguished by a number of scholars (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007; Aidukaite, 2011; Jahn & Kuitto, 2011; Kuitto, 2016; Jahn, 2017) according to their socio-economic indicators (the Human Development Index, the shadow economy, Gini coefficient of equalized disposable income, minimum wage, mean monthly earnings, severe material deprivation, and social policy expenses): Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary as the best performers; Bulgaria and Romania at the bottom; and the Baltic countries, Poland, and Slovakia in the middle.

We start our discussion with the review of debates on the desire to place CEE countries into the existing welfare state typologies, the emergence of the post-communist or Eastern European welfare state model, and how this

debate has evolved. A number of studies confirm that the welfare state in CEE evolved in a similar way as in the West, except the distinct interaction of the communist period, which, however, was also marked by extensive and generous social policies comparable with those in the West (see e.g., Inglot, 2008, 2016; Aidukaite, 2009; Cerami & Vanhuysse, 2009; Szikra & Tomka, 2009). Nevertheless, the CEE region is currently quite diverse (Cerami, 2006, 2011; Aidukaite, 2011; Kuitto, 2016). Hence, this chapter asks about the place of new EU member state countries in the broader 'family' of welfare systems of old member states.

We then focus on the evolution of research in selected social policy areas in the CEE. Much of this research is relatively recent because prior to the collapse of the various communist regimes in the CEE region (in 1989–1991), social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequalities were considered non-existent in the communist world (Matkovic et al., 2007). The chapter aims to review the evolution of social policy research since the 1990s in three social policy areas attracting the most scholarly attention in the region: family policy, pension insurance, and poverty.

WELFARE STATE REGIME/MODEL OF CEE: INCLUSION IN WESTERN TYPOLOGIES

At the beginning of the 1990s, social policy research evolved around the desire to place the CEE countries into existing welfare state regimes and typologies (see Deacon, 1992; Aidukaite, 2006; Cerami, 2006; Fenger, 2007). The changes in the social policy systems of the CEE were explained by the economic affordability of those countries' programmes, global pressures from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the legacy of the past, the political leanings of the government, weak civil society, and low trade union membership (Deacon, 1997, 2000; Ferge, 2001; Aidukaite, 2009; Cerami & Vanhuysse, 2009; Orenstein 2009). However, there were no clear agreements or clear empirical evidence in the scientific literature on whether radical welfare state cutbacks took place in CEE. It was also not clear whether CEE had developed a new welfare state type of its own, or whether it was developing one of the variants of the ideal-typical welfare state regimes delineated by Esping-Andersen (1990) (for details see Deacon, 1992; Abrahamson, 1999; Aidukaite, 2011).

Earlier studies have seen welfare state development in the post-communist region as falling within the liberal or residual regime (see Standing, 1996; Ferge, 1997, 2001), in which welfare is based on a mix of social insurance and social assistance, and a partial privatization of social policy. As those studies underlined, attempts at reform have come up against a legacy of what was essentially comprehensive social policy. However, it should be pointed

out that some of those studies tended to overgeneralize and insufficiently accounted for the variety within the CEE region (see Fodor et al., 2002; Aidukaite, 2011; Javornik, 2014 on this point). Thus, other studies focused on highlighting these differences, suggesting CEE countries may not easily fit existing regime typologies.

Deacon (1992), for instance, predicted that Eastern European countries would develop their future social policies into distinct regimes that may even lie outside the three worlds of welfare capitalism described by Esping-Andersen. The comparative studies that followed also highlighted emerging differences among the Eastern European countries. Fajth (1999) emphasized that most of the post-communist countries have been moving away from collective solutions to individualized ones regarding social security. However, they have not necessarily followed the same paths when reforming their institutional arrangements. In his comparative study of institutions and their consequences for the social policy of several Western and transitional countries, Kangas (1999) concluded that to place the post-communist countries in the prevailing welfare state typologies is rather problematic as neither the Western nor the post-communist countries form a single homogenous group. There was, and still is, large variation when it comes to the institutional set-ups of social security programmes between them. Manning (2004) came to similar conclusions. In a comprehensive overview of changes since 1989 based on the main social indicators and social policies in eight East-Central European countries, he found that there were variations between these societies not only in the policies that they have developed, but also in their social and economic performances.

Many scholars have therefore logically emphasized emerging differences among Eastern European countries as well (Aidukaite, 2006; Bohle, 2007; Lendvai, 2008), although categorizations differ depending upon the countries being studied. Bohle demonstrated that the Baltic states' welfare regime can be characterized as neoliberal, with low social spending and a low degree of decommodification. In contrast, the Slovenian welfare state comes closer to encompassing the West European model, while the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) exhibit something in-between the conservative and liberal welfare states. Lendvai (2008) has grouped Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia as closely falling into the neoliberal model based on macroeconomic indicators of welfare state spending, income inequality, and minimum wage. In contrast, Lendvai's study suggests the Czech Republic and Slovenia were the most 'socially conscious' welfare states according to their highest social spending levels and lowest poverty levels compared to the other eight new European Union (EU) countries. Poland and Hungary were seen to occupy a middle ground. In short, scholars differ in their classification of CEE countries and the variation evident among them. It has further been suggested that differences exist not only within the CEE region

but even within smaller regions (e.g., the three Baltic states when examining social security programmes in more detail, see for example Aidukaite, 2006).

In contrast to studies emphasizing variation within the region, another strand of research tried to group Eastern European countries into a distinct regime unaccounted for in Esping-Andersen's typology (see for example Wehner et al., 2004; Golinowska et al., 2008; Aidukaite, 2011). This regime was called the Eastern European or post-communist regime and is defined as sharing characteristics of both the liberal and conservative corporatist regimes as well as having some distinct post-communist features. These features include a high take-up rate of social security, but relatively low benefit levels, the identification of the social policy system with the Soviet past, and having citizens with a low level of trust in the state institutions.

Similarly, other studies (Cerami, 2006; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Inglot, 2008) have emphasized parallels among the CEE countries in their welfare state systems rather than variation, including characteristics such as universalism, corporatism, and egalitarianism, and the commitment to insure against a fairly wide range of risks. Such a system of social insurance appears, in principle, closer to the broad European conception of social insurance enshrined in the International Labour Organization than more liberal models. However, according to Cerami (2006), CEE countries also implemented some readjustments to the new post-communist consensus, such as market-based schemes, private pension insurance, and means-tested benefits. The implementation of these measures would suggest a shift away from the broad European conception of social insurance.

Despite these shared characteristics of an ideal-typical post-communist regime type, most social policy research would suggest key differences remain. The most recent literature (Jahn & Kuitto, 2011; Kuitto, 2016; Jahn, 2017) focused on social policy performance in CEE countries (often in comparison with Western ones) concludes that CEE countries do not form their own welfare state regime type. Instead, they form either hybrid cases (Kuitto, 2016) or simply fall into different regimes (Jahn, 2017). Similar conclusions about variation within smaller regions can be made. For example, when it comes to the three Baltic states, they do not necessarily fall into the same category. According to the level and source of welfare financing, Estonia has more in common with Slovakia and the Czech Republic than with Latvia and Lithuania. The former countries rely heavily on contribution financing, while in the latter countries, together with Bulgaria and Romania, the relationship between contribution financing and tax financing is somewhat more balanced. Yet, the generosity of social insurance benefits measured as a composition of replacement rates, eligibility criteria, and the coverage rate is higher in Latvia and Estonia (together with Slovenia and the Czech Republic) than in Lithuania. Lithuania falls together with Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary into a cluster of

less generous countries (Kuitto, 2016). A further study by Aidukaite (2019) based on a detailed examination of social policy development in the three Baltic states also highlighted emerging differences among three countries. This is especially remarkable for family policy, pension insurance, and unemployment protection.

To sum up, the development of the welfare state in the CEE region has provoked a plethora of social policy research which tried to delineate the ideal-typical features and place these new democracies into the 'old' welfare state regimes and typologies. Research then emerged highlighting differences between CEE countries both in studies developed at the turn of the twenty-first century as well as in more recent studies. At present it is clear that the CEE region is diverse, and that the welfare state in this region has neither evolved into an Esping-Andersen regime type, nor into a distinct welfare regime type, but rather into a mixed/hybrid model. Alongside attention to welfare state similarities and differences within the CEE region, research on social policy increasingly focused on specific social policy fields, in particular family policy, pensions, and poverty, which we now turn to.

THE EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH ON FAMILY POLICY

Family policy reforms in CEE countries have attracted considerable attention from social scientists since the 1990s seeking to explain changes, outcomes, and future development pathways of family policy in the CEE region (see, e.g., Pascall & Manning, 2000; Fodor et al., 2002; Szikra & Tomka, 2009; Javornik, 2014; Inglot, 2016; Aidukaite, 2021). The main factors influencing the trajectories of research in this area have been demographic pressures (e.g., population ageing), the global financial crisis of 2008, and conceptual influences such as the (de)familialization discussion.

There has been considerable attention of research on family policy in the CEE region directly related to the collapse of the communist regimes across CEE and the dramatic impact on children's wellbeing, women's labour market participation, and family formation patterns. Among the most debated outcomes of the post-communist transformation were and still are declining fertility rates, which, over a period of more than 25 years, never recovered to the pre-transformation period (see Eurostat, 2020). Therefore, demographic pressures such as the ageing of the population, low fertility rates, and emigration have stimulated the scientific debate throughout the CEE region (Ainsaar & Stankuniene, 2010; Oláh, 2015; Ainsaar & Rootalu, 2016; Frejka & Gietel-Basten, 2016; Ainsaar, 2019).

The demographic pressure imposed by declining fertility rates, ageing of the population, and the population decline caused by emigration was particularly strong in the Baltics (see Ainsaar & Stankuniene, 2010; Ainsaar & Rootalu,

2016; Ainsaar, 2019). This stimulated social policy research in this area, with numerous studies documenting the reconfigurations of family policy systems (see, e.g., Aidukaite, 2006, 2019; Ainsaar, 2019). These countries were also hit dramatically by the global financial and economic crisis of 2008, which impacted family policies, especially in Lithuania (Aidukaite, 2019; Ainsaar, 2019). Specifically, the universal child allowance payable for all children suffered significant cutbacks in Lithuania, while means-tested benefits were expanded.

The impact of the financial and economic crisis on the family support systems in the CEE region was also researched by scholars focusing on the Czech Republic and Slovenia (Blum et al., 2014; Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2014). Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2014) show, for example, how the crisis opened a window of opportunity for the centre-right governments in power (2007–2013) to carry out family policy reforms, such as making birth benefits means tested or introducing greater freedom of choice in the parental leave system. Such changes have contributed to a strengthening of the liberal path according to the authors. In Slovenia, crisis-related reforms were also directed towards family policy. While the right-wing governments in 2012 did not change the family policy path, the number of family benefit recipients was reduced by making some universal family benefits means tested and benefit levels were reduced for many families. All this was done using the austerity argument (Blum et al., 2014).

Another factor influencing research on family policies in the CEE region is the development of familialization-defamilialization typologies (see Leitner, 2003; Lohmann & Zagel, 2016; Saraceno, 2016; see also Chapter 3 by Van Lancker and Zagel, this volume), which stimulated the discussion on how to place the CEE countries into these typologies. Studies on the CEE countries showed emerging differences in their childcare and parental leave policies (see Javornik, 2014; Aidukaite, 2021). For instance, Javornik (2014), focusing on parental leave and childcare policies (from birth to mandatory schooling age), showed significant variation in the degree of familialization-defamilialization among eight CEE countries of the EU (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). Grounded in Leitner's (2003) familialism typology, Javornik distinguished three policy types: (1) Slovenian and Lithuanian systems were assigned as supporting defamilialism since states seek to incentivize women's continuous employment and active fatherhood through parental and paternity leave policies and available public childcare; (2) support to family systems in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Estonia appeared to support explicit familialism with an emphasis on familial childcare and gendered parenting; and (3) the state in Poland, Slovakia, and Latvia leaves parents without public support, thus maintaining implicit familialism. In short, similar to social policy research placing the CEE region

within or outside existing welfare regime types, research on family policy suggests this variation is just as considerable when taking a more detailed look at a given social policy field.

This variation extends to the within-region variation discussed earlier. For example, Aidukaite (2021) highlights the emerging differences in the evolution of family support systems in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) between 2004 and 2019. The Lithuanian family support system is the most defamilializing, however, with some hidden familialism in childcare practice, where informal childcare is provided by extended family members. The Latvian public support system for families and children was attributed to implicit familialism as the state supported working parents during the period 2004–2019; however, support was provided at a relatively low replacement rate. At the same time, flat-rate childcare benefits cannot ensure adequate well-being, which has to be sought through either the family or market. A detailed examination of the Estonian system showed a development from explicit familialism to optional familialism during this period, particularly with the introduction of a generous parental leave benefit in 2006.

A number of case studies suggest that in some CEE countries, such as Poland and Hungary, an increasing trend of familialization and a return to traditional gender views is taking place in family policy (Szelewa, 2020). In Poland, for instance, one can find a stronger maternalist direction in public discourse on childbearing which emerged especially during the right-wing coalition in office since November 2015 (Szelewa, 2016). The latter maternalist direction in Poland was in contrast to the mainstream trend and research on the increased role of fathers in childcare in the CEE (e.g., Hobson et al., 2011; Takács, 2019; Aidukaite & Telisaukaite-Cekanavice, 2020; Maslauskaitė & Tereškinas, 2020).

Overall, research on family policy in the CEE region mirrored the general policy developments in this area, driven by demographic pressures, the impact of the financial and economic crisis on family policy systems, the development of the familialization-defamilialization typologies, and the transformation of the father's role in childcare. As with research on welfare regime typologies in the CEE region, these studies suggest more variation than similarity.

THE EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH ON PENSIONS

A second strand of social policy research emerged in the CEE region related to pension insurance reforms, which attracted particular attention given the threat posed by ageing populations (see also Chapter 6 by Ebbinghaus and Möhring, this volume). Primarily, research on pension reforms in the CEE region focuses on the relationship between globalization and Europeanization, outlining how world-regional (EU) and global (World Bank, United Nations,

International Monetary Fund, International Labour Organization) institutions/organizations have shaped policy by spreading their ideas, in part by providing consultancy, policy, and technical advice (Yeates, 2008).

Social policy research on the CEE region provides strong evidence that because of their economic vulnerability, CEE countries are rather susceptible to the influence of globalization, thereby impacting pension reform. For instance, Casey (2004) has argued that Latvia and Estonia and partly Lithuania have implemented the World Bank's so-called 'three pillar' model of privatization of pension insurance, not least because they were recipients of substantial World Bank loans. The same could be true for Hungary and Poland (Orenstein, 2009). Another significant reason why some CEE societies were more susceptible to globalization could be explained by the desire of these countries to join Euro-Atlantic organizations. That made their political elite more likely to accept advice from global organizations (Chandler, 2001).

Similarly, the implementation of the partial privatization of pension provisions in some East-Central European countries and the Baltic states has also been a broad subject for debate and research. Studies show that the role of international actors propagating new ideas and discourses has indeed played an important role in these reforms (Cerami, 2011; Inglot, 2016). However, these studies also emphasized path dependency in the process of pension transformation and the important role played by national actors and their understanding of how pension insurance should be organized.

Comparing these two strands of literature on the CEE region, the influence of Europeanization is not so visible and straightforward compared to the influence of globalization and international actors (see Rys, 2001a, 2001b; Wehner et al., 2004). This is because 'the EU does not impose on member countries any specific hard law rules on social policy' (Rys, 2001b: 185). It is therefore not surprising that research establishes more of an influence from the World Bank than Europeanization with regards to pension insurance, particularly in the Baltic countries (Casey, 2004). Nevertheless, some indirect evidence on the influence of the Europeanization in the sphere of pensions can be detected. For example, in the comparative study of pension insurance reform in Latvia and Russia, Chandler (2001) provided evidence that the implementation of pension insurance reform in Latvia was easier to achieve compared to Russia, although in both countries, pension reform proved to be politically unpopular. Chandler claims that Latvia's greater international orientation and its commitment to return to 'Western' Europe and Western European values were important in influencing its government's commitment to pursue pension reform. In contrast, Russian leaders tended to perceive few advantages from Western-oriented reforms. More recent studies on the region have looked at the results of implemented pension privatization reforms in the CEE and how

these reforms are likely to affect income inequalities among the retired population (e.g., Medaiskis & Eirošius, 2021; Piirits, 2021).

THE EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH FOCUSED ON POVERTY

The CEE region is diverse, with poverty being prevalent to a different extent (Alam et al., 2005; Argatu, 2018). In this section we aim to provide an overview of the main factors influencing poverty research in the CEE since the 1990s, including the legacy effects of the socialist era, post-communist liberalization, the influence of international agencies, and the process of euro integration.

For more than half a century, social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequalities were considered non-existent in the Soviet Union (Sipos, 1992; Matkovic et al., 2007) and were a taboo topic for researchers (Stubbs et al., 2019). It was assumed that all social problems, including poverty, were solved in communist societies, largely by means of full employment, universal access to education and health care, enterprise-based social security, subsidized prices for many essential goods and services, and the provision of social housing (Stubbs et al., 2019). Hence, poverty in the Soviet block was portrayed as an individualized ‘pathology’ – an attribute of the lazy, unmotivated, those lacking self-discipline, deviating from social norms or those unwilling to work due to vicious moral predispositions and unproductive habits.

In practice, vulnerable groups included the rural poor, large families, oppressed minorities, older people, and ‘anyone living outside the rigid work eligibility’ (Stubbs et al., 2019: 16). The gaps in social provision meant a lack of goods and services to satisfy the basic needs of people (Šileika & Zabarauskaitė, 2006). Hence, the absolutist tradition of conceptualizing poverty as a basic need problem was strong in the CEE and arguably to at least some degree rooted in the Soviet legacy (Sipos, 1992).

While hidden under socialism, poverty became increasingly visible in the CEE region in the 1990s (UNICEF, 1994; Milanovic, 1996; Simai, 2006; Berend, 2009). After the collapse of the Soviet system, large groups of the population were exposed to poverty, making it impossible to ignore. In the meantime, the field of poverty research in the CEE region was scarce and underfinanced. The predominant understanding of poverty as largely rooted in individual pathological behaviour was further strengthened in the post-socialist era by free market neoliberalist ideology, where the very idea of a welfare state or a social state ‘was judged as, at best, “premature” and at worst, a legacy of socialism which had to be shrunk, residualized, and responsibilized so as not to be an obstacle to economic reform’ (Stubbs et al., 2019: 14).

With the lack of funding and political attention to a social policy agenda, scientific research was unable to keep pace with the rapid changes in the social conditions across the region in the 1990s (Stubbs et al., 2019). As the main source of research funding came from international agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP, the International Labour Organization, and World Bank, at the time, many policy reports echoed the main ideas of these organizations, including those on poverty alleviation, safety nets, and a need for reform (Stubbs et al., 2019). The United Nations agencies also played an important role in promoting a capability approach to poverty and its multidimensional measurement in the CEE region, especially with regards to human development indicators and research (see, e.g., Horvath et al., 2012).

The economic growth of the 2000s and the ambition of the CEE countries to join the EU brought about important changes in the way poverty was perceived and analysed. The post-communist transformations in the CEE coincided with important developments in the sphere of poverty research and policy in the EU. While poverty reduction was not among the initial primary EU aims – the focus was rather on economic development and cooperation – the Lisbon process put the issue of poverty firmly on the political agenda in the EU in the late 1990s (Daly, 2010). The influence of the EU discourse on poverty research intensified around the accession of the CEE countries into the EU during the late 1990s and mid-2000s and remained important thereafter. This influence was facilitated both by the open method of coordination in social policy and as the EU now provides an important source of funding for research and social policy development in the region.

A shift in the research on poverty in the CEE region was the official adoption of relative at-risk-of-poverty measures, which occurred in the context of implementation of the Lisbon Strategy launched in 2000. While there were previous reports on a sharp increase of relative poverty in the CEE between 1989 and the mid-1990s (Milanovic, 1996; UNICEF, 1994), the euro integration process put pressure on the CEE countries to mainstream the relative notion of poverty and to shift towards its measurement using a common methodology, including the use of income rather than consumption data. This transition did not happen without academic debate. The economies of scale used to equalize disposable income when estimating at-risk-of-poverty rates were argued to be lower in Central-Eastern European countries than in their Western counterparts (Mysikova & Zelinsky, 2019). Moreover, relative poverty statistics were criticized for not reflecting the true levels of poverty and deprivation in countries where incomes and expenditures were relatively low due to high informality and in-kind production and consumption (Šileika & Zabarauskaitė, 2006).

Poverty research, including in the CEE region, was also fuelled by reconceptualizing poverty as social exclusion in the EU in early 2000s; the two terms

were often used interchangeably in political discourse (Atkinson & Davoudi, 2000). In the context of implementation of the 'Europe 2020' strategy, the notions of social inclusion and social investment started shaping political and academic debates (see e.g., Cantillon, 2011; Kvist, 2014). Both approaches call for a multidimensional and intertemporal understanding of poverty and its measurement. However, it should be noted that there is low availability of longitudinal data in the CEE region, which is important for the analysis of the long-term and intergenerational effects of poverty and its dynamics.

The latest EU social policy strategy is the EU Pillar of Social Rights, which includes an ambitious goal of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030. The strategy aims at promoting equal opportunities, access to the labour market, and fair working conditions. In addition, it is distinguished from the previous EU strategies by explicitly focusing on social protection and inclusion, including children's right to protection from poverty and a right to adequate minimum income benefits, effective access to enabling goods, services, and housing for those in need at all stages of life. It is, however, too early to evaluate to what extent the notion of social rights will penetrate the academic and political debates and poverty research in the CEE.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has reviewed the evolution of welfare state research in the CEE region and its development since the 1990s in three selected social policy areas common to CEE regional research: family policy, pension insurance, and poverty. This overview shows that the CEE, which was treated as a unified region by earlier social policy scholars, has evolved into different welfare state trajectories with varying social policy outcomes. However, the trajectories of social policy research followed similar patterns throughout the region and were driven by similar processes and factors. These processes included demographic pressures and familialization-defamilialization processes in the sphere of family policies, and the influence of international agencies and the EU in the spheres of pension insurance and poverty research. In welfare state research, the desire to place CEE countries into existing welfare state typologies has particularly stimulated analytical discussions among social policy scholars.

This chapter, however, has limitations. It provided a fragmentary look at the most important aspects of research development in the CEE area and focused on selected international publications, mostly comparative studies. Research on the welfare state and social policy is, undoubtedly, much broader in its scope and depth, covering other areas of social policy research, which were not discussed.

Future research on social policy in the CEE region will likely provide new evidence and insights on the relevant issues discussed in this chapter. There will still be discussions about which directions welfare state models are heading in the CEE countries, especially in relation to social policy privatization (e.g., pensions), demographic concerns over the ageing of the population, changing family patterns (single parenthood, divorce), and changing gender roles (fathers' involvement in child upbringing) and family forms. Changing migration processes are also likely to affect research in the CEE region. Since the 1990s, the CEE countries have experienced massive outward labour migration (especially Lithuania, see on this point Genelyte, 2019). In recent years, these countries began attracting migrants from neighbouring countries and experiencing inflows of refugees. These changed patterns will provoke a plethora of research on migration, the integration of ethnic minorities and refugees and their access to social security in the region. Family policy research in the region is likely to follow 'Western' patterns in placing greater attention on work–life balance and shared parental roles within the family. Yet, the emphasis should be placed on long-term care as part of family policy measures, especially familial care. In many CEE countries, women are overburdened with care responsibilities (public or private), and critical questions remain in both family policy and pension research: How should family policy be reformed to solve the problems of child poverty and ensure gender equality in the region? Should pension systems be reformed so as to increase the influence of the private pension funds or should pay-as-you-go systems be maintained? In the sphere of poverty research, the analysis of the multidimensional, long-term, and intergenerational effects of poverty and its dynamics should be stimulated by the increasing availability of administrative longitudinal data. There is also an increasing pressure for developing new methodologies for conducting distributional impact assessments of policy measures, including that of poverty risks in the region.

Other important research themes remain. These include the need to advance research in the CEE region on social investment and social rights, climate change and the development of the eco-social welfare state, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social policy development and wellbeing of the CEE population.

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