

## **ESPAnet NL-VL “Justice in Social Policy and Social Work in the Low Countries”**

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### **Stream C.1 The welfare state and social justice**

#### **Cross-national configurations of distributive justice preferences: an east-west divide?**

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#### **Abstract**

In an era of welfare state restructuring, the fundamental social question “who should get what and why” comes back to the fore (Mau & Veghte, 2007; van Oorschot, 2000, p. 34). In particular, the question remains which of the three principles of distributive justice should form the basis of the distribution of the burdens and benefits of our welfare system: equality, equity or need (Deutsch, 1975). Besides the extensive body of normative theories of social justice, an increasing number of studies investigate which principles of distributive justice are preferred by the public at large (Liebig & Sauer, 2016). However, this empirical research fails to fully grasp what types of welfare distributions people consider just, as it regularly assumes that citizens will systematically prefer only one of the three principles. This is highly unrealistic, as people may combine and balance multiple distributive ideas simultaneously (e.g. Franke & Simonson, 2018).

In addition, existing studies have limitedly recognized that these plausible combinations of distributive principles might vary across European welfare states and that divisions between East- and West-Europe might in this regard be especially strong. While the West-European welfare states have known long traditions of certain principles embedded in their institutional designs (Clasen & van Oorschot, 2002; cf. welfare regimes), East-European countries have known a multitude of state supported principles. While these countries were especially confronted with the universal principle of equality during the socialist or communist era, in recent decades they have shifted to more selective and market-based distributions (Gijsberts, 2002). This might stimulate a divide between West-European citizens preferring the principle dominant within their welfare state (cf. Taylor-Gooby et al., 2018) and East-European citizens who combine universal logics with more selective or conditional ideas. We contribute to the public opinion literature on distributive justice by analyzing how people

combine multiple distributive principles and how these combinations diverge across West- and East-European welfare states.

To test this, multiple group Latent Profile Analysis is conducted on data of the ninth round of the European Social Survey. In particular, we conduct analyses on three West-European countries with diverging dominant justice principles in their institutional designs (West-Germany, the United Kingdom and Norway) and three East-European states (Bulgaria, Serbia and Slovenia). Preliminary results indicate that three classes can be distinguished of how people combine the principles of equality, equity and need: (1) a more selective class supporting the principles of equity and need; (2) a more universal class supporting the principles of equality and need and (3) a class supporting all three principles simultaneously. Although citizens of East European citizens indeed seem more likely to belong to the class combining all three principles, West-European citizens do not necessarily belong more to the classes that operate in line with the dominant justice principles in their welfare states.

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