

### **The comeback of food support as an anti-poverty strategy**

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Although the elimination of poverty is formulated as the most elementary intention of the welfare state for decades, the question of poverty is still the most central issue of the social dimension of Europe. In the light of the deep social and economic crises and risks that many European welfare states face, the proportion of people who are living in poverty or the 'at risk' population is increasing rather than decreasing. As such, poverty remains a persistent, complex and multi-dimensional problem for social policy makers in most Western societies. Social work – both as an academic discipline and practice-based profession - has a long history in its commitment to deal with this social issue of poverty and social inequality. Against the background of the growing social inequalities, recently a plea is made by critical social work scholars for a "poverty-aware approach" that addresses poverty as a structural problem and a violation of human rights. This approach engages with the social justice agenda of social work and promotes social change by focusing on the violation of rights connected with the material and socioeconomic aspects of poverty and the relational-symbolic aspects of poverty.

Parallel to the spread of this "poverty aware approach", the number of food redistribution initiatives is increasing over the last 20 years, and especially since the financial and economic crisis in Europe in 2008. It includes a diversity of initiatives with different histories of origin embedded in (a combination of) various logics, for example poverty, sustainability, social cohesion and health. Kessler (2009, 2014) introduced the concept of "(new) charity economy", referring to a distribution system in which basic goods are distributed for free or sold at discount prices to "the poor" or "the needy", most of the time by volunteers. It concerns non-monetary benefits alongside statutory social insurance, supply or welfare structures, however sometimes even replacing them. As such, poverty reduction is increasingly perceived as a task of civil society based on donations and volunteer work, which illustrates the erosion of the active role of the welfare state as a provider or at least a guarantor of prosperity and well-being.

In our presentation, we want to address the question about how the increasingly popular redistribution of food as an anti-poverty strategy is underpinned in everyday charity economy and social work practices in Ghent – a city in the Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium - and how this resonates with features of charity- and rights-based social work. We rely on a rich basis of empirical material (in-depth interviews supplemented with document- and environmental analysis) to unravel the "poverty-complex" in concrete practices by taking into account four central fields of tension: private-public, selective-universal, conditional-unconditional, instrumental – lifeworld oriented.