

Poverty Reduction in European Cities: Local Governments' Strategies and Programmes to Reduce Poverty; Interview Results from Austria

Authors : Melanie Schinnerl, Dorothea Greiling

Abstract : In the context of the 2020 strategy, poverty and its fight returned to the center of national political efforts. This served as motivation for an Austrian research grant-funded project to focus on the under-researched local government level with the aim to identify municipal best-practice cases and to derive policy implications for Austria. Designing effective poverty reduction strategies is a complex challenge which calls for an integrated multi-actor in approach. Cities are increasingly confronted to combat poverty, even in rich EU-member states. By doing so cities face substantial demographic, cultural, economic and social challenges as well as changing welfare state regimes. Furthermore, there is a low willingness of (right-wing) governments to support the poor. Against this background, the research questions are: 1. How do local governments define poverty? 2. Who are the main risk groups and what are the most pressing problems when fighting urban poverty? 3. What is regarded as successful anti-poverty initiatives? 4. What is the underlying welfare state concept? To address the research questions a multi-method approach was chosen, consisting of a systematic literature analysis, a comprehensive document analysis, and expert interviews. For interpreting the data the project follows the qualitative-interpretive paradigm. Municipal approaches for reducing poverty are compared based on deductive, as well as inductive identified criteria. In addition to an intensive literature analysis, interviews (40) were conducted in Austria since the project started in March 2018. From the other countries, 14 responses have been collected, providing a first insight. Regarding the definition of poverty the EU SILC-definition as well as counting the persons who receive need-based minimum social benefits, the Austrian form of social welfare, are the predominant approaches in Austria. In addition to homeless people, single-parent families, un-skilled persons, long-term unemployed persons, migrants (first and second generation), refugees and families with at least 3 children were frequently mentioned. The most pressing challenges for Austrian cities are: expected reductions of social budgets, a great insecurity of the central government's social policy reform plans, the growing number of homeless people and a lack of affordable housing. Together with affordable housing, old-age poverty will gain more importance in the future. The Austrian best practice examples, suggested by interviewees, focused primarily on homeless, children and young people (till 25). Central government's policy changes have already negative effects on programs for refugees and elderly unemployed. Social Housing in Vienna was frequently mentioned as an international best practice case, other growing cities can learn from. The results from Austria indicate a change towards the social investment state, which primarily focuses on children and labour market integration. The first insights from the other countries indicate that affordable housing and labor market integration are cross-cutting issues. Inherited poverty and old-age poverty seems to be more pressing outside Austria.

Keywords : anti-poverty policies, European cities, empirical study, social investment

Conference Title : ICIES 2019 : International Conference on Inequality and Economic Security

Conference Location : Venice, Italy

Conference Dates : April 11-12, 2019