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From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of Roma Population

Czech System of Social Protection and Disappearance of Social Citizenship

Dissertation Thesis

Prague 2022

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Year of the defence: 2023

References

TRLIFAJOVÁ, Lucie. From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of Roma Population. Czech System of Social Protection and Disappearance of Social Citizenship. Prague, 2022. 206 pages. Dissertation thesis (PhD.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociological Studies, Department of Public and Social Policy. Supervisor prof. PhDr. Martin Potůček, CSc., M.Sc.

Abstract

Equal position in society – and the ability to claim citizenship rights – is shaped by the feelings of recognition. This thesis examines the process of the disappearance of social citizenship in the Czech Republic, a gradual change in the social protection system targeted to poor and low-income households, which deprives poor people not only of an economic protection but also of their equal status and recognition.

2004–2012 reforms reduced the Czech system of social protection of poor and low-income households to a conditional and stigmatizing system, similar to countries that embraced a neoliberal approach to social policies. This thesis focuses on the "post-neoliberal" development of these systems in the following decade. The period is characterized by a greater involvement of politicians representing regions with higher proportion of inhabitants facing economic insecurity. In most cases, however, the involvement of these players did not reverse the restriction of social policies but rather accelerated and strengthened it.

The thesis examines how the construction of social benefits (especially social assistance scheme) became part of a struggle over control, social status and feeling of dignity in the Czech post-industrial periphery. The debates still follow the neoliberal categories of deservingness, but rather than labour market inclusion, the main goal of legislative changes is the strengthening of municipal power over the behaviour and movement of benefit recipients-Roma. The distinction between the undeserving poor (Roma) and the "decent" citizens legitimizes further restrictions of the system. The social system that is no longer understood as a tool of social protection is turning into a tool of a proactive border-making and racialized hierarchisation between different groups of inhabitants experiencing economic insecurity.

Keywords

Welfare, Citizenship, Precarity, Roma, Czech Republic

Length of the work: 371 000 characters with spaces / 206 pages, without abstract, literature and appendixes

Abstrakt

Od neoliberálních restrikcí ke kontrole romských obyvatel. Český systém sociální ochrany a rozklad sociálního občanství

Postavení člověka ve společnosti – a jeho schopnost vyjednávat o svých občanských právech – je utvářena zejména pocitem uznání. Tato disertace zkoumá proces rozkladu sociálního občanství v České republice, změny v systému sociální ochrany cíleného na chudé a nízkopříjmové domácnosti, který nejen že přestává lidem nabízet ekonomickou ochranu, ale především rovné postavení a pocit uznání.

Reformy českého systému sociální ochrany z let 2004 až 2012 vedly k jeho omezování a násobení kontrolujících a stigmatizujících prvků velmi podobně jako v zemích, kde v sociálních politikách dominují neoliberální přístupy. Předkládaná práce se zaměřuje na vývoj tohoto systému následujícím desetiletí. Jde o období, pro které je charakteristické vyšší zapojení politiků reprezentujících regiony s vyšším podílem lidí, kteří zažívají ekonomickou nejistotu. Ve většině případů ovšem jejich vyšší zapojení nevede k pozastavení omezování sociální ochrany, ale naopak k růstu tlaku na další restriktivní opatření.

Tato disertace zkoumá, jak se nastavení systému sociálních dávek (speciálně Pomoci v hmotné nouzi) stalo součástí vyjednávání ohledně sociální statutu, pocitů kontroly a uznání v český post-industriálních regionech. Tyto debaty stále vycházejí z neoliberálních kategorií zásluhovosti, jejich hlavním cílem nicméně není zapojení na trh práce, ale posilování kontroly obcí nad pohybem a chování příjemců dávek – Romů. Rozdělení na „nezasloužilé“ chudé – Romy a „slušné“ občany legitimizuje další omezování systému. Sociální systém, který v tomto případě není vnímám jako nástroj sociální ochrany, se pak stává nástrojem aktivního vytváření hranic a posilování rasových hierarchií mezi různými skupinami obyvatel v ekonomicky nejistém postavení.

Klíčová slova

Sociální dávky, občanství, prekarita, Romové, Česká repulika

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on December 8, 2022 Lucie Trlifajová

Acknowledgement

Most of all, I would like to thank my colleagues from the Centre for Social Issues - SPOT for many years of an ongoing debate on the changing social reality we are observing around us.

Jakob Hurrle and Petr Kučera, for critical reflections on our experience of researching socially excluded localities, never-ending debates in between and after interviews, late to the night. Filip Pospíšil, for the debates on securitisation, racism and power relations and sharp remarks (I am still a bit afraid which comment will come next). Karel Novák, for his sceptical idealism, insight into the social benefits system, and long debates about work, good work and capitalist economy. Marek Čaněk for political economy perspective on precarious work in globalised capitalist market and inclination to discuss it even during a bike or ski trips. Ludmila Wladyniak for the methodological and theoretical insight, reflexivity and great sensitivity for everyday experience of low-income households. Marie Jelínková for scrutinising my critique and relentless search for the possibilities of institutional change. And Daniela Büchlerová and Ivana Sieglová, not only for the debates, but also for all the trust, support and patience with more chaotic aspect of all the creative cooperations.

I would also like to thank all the members of the Department of Public and Social Policy for their open, friendly, and supportive approach during my studies.

I would especially like to thank Olga Angelovská for her never-ending and ever-smiling patience with all my struggles with administration (particularly the yearly challenge of submitting the Study plan to the SIS). I also owe a lot to Eva Horníčková from the Grant Agency of Charles University for similar support during the years I fought with the administration of my GAUK project, fulfilling the stereotype of a distracted scientist. And of course, to my supervisor Martin Potůček, especially for his time and constructive comments.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Marie Jelínková, Dominika Dražilová, Tereza Virtová, Alžběta Wolfová, Daniela Büchlerová, Ludmila Tydlitátová and Šimon Trlifaj for their help with last minutes revisions and decisions.

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

I still remember the situation quite vividly. It is 2012, the height of the economic crisis, a few months into the "Social reform", a peak of neoliberal push against the Czech system of social protection. I am sitting in a petite room in the Labour Office in Žlutice, a small town in the Czech inner periphery. A woman working in the office is explaining to me how the amounts paid to the people through the minimum income scheme are calculated. I am trying to turn it into an equation. We are struggling to understand each other. You take 30% of a person's income – can I multiple the income by 0.7? Once we found a common language, I spent most of my free time the following day trying to do the calculation. Pages of my field notebook are covered with barely legible equations, trying to capture different situations.

Maybe a bit of nerdish fascination, but I was trying to understand a statement that kept returning to me. We had been doing interviews about Roma and socially excluded localities in the Czech periphery for a few months, and we had heard it so many times: work does not pay. Some said it with understanding, trying to explain the choices of their clients or neighbours. Others with frustration, as a critique: those people – an apparent reference to the Roma – should not be better off than us. I work hard; why should they receive support for free? I kept telling myself there must be a way to verify the claim. In the following years, I worked on small projects for the Agency for Social Inclusion, which gave me more time to turn the equations from Žlutice into models (in the end, I hired a mathematician to help me out). I also had the opportunity to verify the findings through in-depth interviews with people struggling to find the most suitable survival strategy between social benefits, precarious jobs, and loans. I realised how distant the models that follow the logic of construction of social benefits are from the every-day experience of the benefit recipients.

I decided that I needed to understand the premises that shape Czech policies of social protection targeted toward poor and low-income households more: how and why did they become so detached from the increasingly precarious existence of the poor. These questions were the starting point of my PhD project in 2015, titled "Role of the welfare in the context of rising precarity on the labour market".

By then, I had also been far more immersed in the Czech debates about the social benefit system, becoming an "expert" - as surprisingly few people understood how the triangle of social benefit legislation, taxation of different types of precarious contracts and wage garnishment system shaped the economic situation of low-income households. However, hearing stories from different people and regions, listening to political and legislative debates or to chants during anti-Roma demonstrations, more layers of the debate became visible: hidden anxieties and emotions that trigger some heated debates about the welfare, the ways in which social benefits can be used as a performative tool in municipal policies – and centrality of race in the whole debate, perception of the Roma in particular.

The following text is an attempt to reflect on these debates in which I had been personally involved in the context of current academic and theoretical knowledge of the changing role of the welfare state.

The question which stood at the beginning of my PhD had an underlying goal of formulating a better policy. If we better understand the situation of poor, we can construct social policies in a way that would indeed help the people that are "worst of", wouldn't it? Conducting my first analysis around "work must pay" policies, digging into social policy literature on neoliberalism and welfare, social investment (chapter 2.3), I felt that I am indeed able to identify some of the shortcomings in the construction of social policies. I had even been successful in publishing it in the prestigious Journal of European Social Policy (the article is part of this thesis). I had been able to bring these findings into Czech public and policy debate through a cooperation with Czech radio, attracting considerable media attention. I had an opportunity to present some of the results to a (former) Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

And yet, despite possibly having some small impact, these debates felt also very distant from actual topics which shaped debates about social benefits in the Czech Republic. Despite claiming an expertise, I did not believe that what I know about social problems rising from precarious work, debts, in-work poverty would not be known to many, especially as it

impacted large proportion of population in some regions. Yet, I was surprised how solitary my perspective often felt. The claims that were coming from regions which were most impacted by economic insecurity were not calls for more inclusive and stronger social protection for those people that were struggling to cover their needs. No, they were claims for further retrenchment. Often very emotional, they were sometimes formulated as calls for help, sometimes as frustrations over the arrogance of Prague, the capital. In the centre of these claims stood socially excluded localities and their Roma inhabitants. The calls for retrenchment of social benefits reflected intensely experienced feelings of threat, loss of control, unfairness.

I could frame these claims are racist, as they of course were[1]. But this would not help me understand. In a way it would also support a tendency (replicated sometimes even in academia) to treat the racism in post-communist CEE countries as a part of "transition" towards democracy, normalize it as a character of "aspiring" democracy. A similar approach is sometimes applied by the Czech liberal elite towards the "periphery", framing the racism in moral terms (Slačálek, Šitera 2022). Such framing does obscure the fact, that even though open racisms might be more acceptable in Czech public and policy discourse, the processes that shape the racialisation of poverty and welfare are embedded in economical and ideological changes, which are not specific for the CEE post-communist transition, but characteristic for the current state of global capitalism.

While observing the calls for welfare retrenchment coming from the Czech economic periphery, I had increasingly more data from other researchers as well as my own analyses, that could confirm that economic insecurity is a wide problem of Czech society. Why did none of these people make their struggles visible? Why did they not make any claims for greater protection, why did no (or very few) politicians formulate any demands, particularly those coming from regions where precarious insecure employment and debts were common experience?

In trying to understand these processes I had to question my own preunderstandings. First, the initial question of my PhD, the ideal of constructing better social policies, is founded on

[1] Judging people on the basis of an ascribed (Roma) identity and determining their behaviour on the basis of their alleged "culture".

grounds that social rights are something integral to a democratic society. We might observe how they change, evaluate their impact, think of ways how they can work better. However, from what I observed, despite the fact that they are inscribed in our legal systems, it does not seem that the ideal of social rights is widely shared in the Czech debate and – and this is especially important – called upon.

As I will discuss in this thesis, multiple authors had shown how neoliberalism stigmatizes poverty, labels those who experience it as second-class, failed members of the society (chapter 2.5). As I will also describe in this text – and this will not come as a surprise for those who had been following Czech debates about welfare targeted to this group – a similar trend can be observed in the Czech Republic. With such an approach from public institutions and policy makers, it makes sense, that no one wants to be treated as "poor", but distance themselves from them. Bridget Anderson uses the term "tolerated citizen" to describe the position of people, who are slightly better off, but feel that they are at risk of being treated as a failure. To legitimise their own position, they need to distance themselves from the worst of. Multiple authors had shown how neoliberal framing of poverty and welfare ("welfare dependency") contributes to the stigmatisation of the system of social protection and its recipients.

Building on the extensive critical research of the impact of neoliberalism on the construction of the system of social protection, perception and situation of its recipients (chapter 2.5), I would like in this thesis to take the debates one step further. While I follow the changes in the social protection system in the Czech context, my main focus is on the process in which delegitimized welfare is turned into a tool of governance of the Roma. Considerable academic attention has been given to the impact of neoliberal approaches on the Czech system of social protection, particularly its peak in the 2011/2012 social reform (chapter 3.1). My focus is on the subsequent decade, the period after the "social reform" till 2021, the first year of COVID.

I analyse the process of "racialisation" of welfare in this period in the context of current debates about poverty governance, inequality, and race, building on the work of Wacquant (2009), Fassin (2013), Soss, Fording, Schram (2011) and especially Hub van Baar and Powell (2011, 2019), who examines the links between neoliberalism and legitimacy of ethnic governmentality regimes (chapter 2.6). The main empirical part of my thesis follows the

process in which public policies still use a performative language of social and labour market inclusion, but the changes of the benefit system turn into a tool of greater control and disciplination targeted (often explicitly) towards Roma inhabitants of socially excluded localities.

What is happening within the realm of the Czech social policies might not come as a surprise to those who come from a Romani studies background, but for a researcher of social policies such as myself, who started with ideals of better policies for all - I have to admit, that I was troubled. Hence, in trying to understand the reason of my unease, I had to search for arguments, which would confirm (or refute) my preunderstanding. Why are social rights, and particularly these often-contested social rights of poor, important? Should we really be concerned?

These questions led me to include another – most abstract – analytical layer, which would allow me to better understand the impact of the above-described process. I start this thesis with a conceptual debate about citizenship. Even if we all have legal equal status, citizenship rights are not guaranteed to all members of society equally, but are (constantly) negotiated, relying upon social norms and values, but also changing them. Referring to Isin (2009), Anderson (2013) and Yuval-Davis (2011), I show how the perception of deservingness and recognition is very important in this process, as it can serve both as a justification of exclusionary practices but also allow for empowerment and inclusion in a society. I found particularly useful Isin's (2009) conceptualisation of the appropriation of a "right to make claim" as a full member of a society (chapter 2.1) This perspective shaped my approached in all parts of this thesis. In following the processes of stigmatisation and racialisation of welfare, I also followed a process in which social systems and the way we think about them deprived a large group of people of recognition, a possibility to voice their experience towards the society in which they live.

To interpret these processes, I have returned to Marshall's (1950) famous essay on social citizenship and its more recent reinterpretations (I had been particularly influenced by Francesco Laruffa (2022). It allowed me to conceptualise social citizenship as a normative perspective, through which I can better see the importance of (disappearance of) recognition and participation in the construction of the system of social protection (chapter 2.2). It allows me to go beyond discussions about the effectivity of construction of a particular welfare system. In this sense this dissertation is also a contribution to the current debate about social polarisation and the growing distrust in democratic society and its institutions.

1.1 Main Questions and Structure of The Thesis

The main questions of this thesis reflect the development of my own understanding of the topic, which I have described in the Introduction. The main question of this thesis is:

What is the role of social protection in the context of rising precarity on the labour market in Czech Republic?

The following specific questions elaborate different perspective how to approach and interpret this question. Each of them is based on a different theoretical/conceptual framework as well as on empirical observations of process that are described in this thesis.

- The first perspective emphasises the functionalities/effectiveness of the system of social protection targeted on poor and low-income households. It examines the increased distance between character of economic insecurity in the Czech Republic and construction of the system of social protection targeted towards poor and low-income household:

  Why is the construction of the system of social protection distant from the experience of the poor? Which premises shape the Czech welfare system targeted toward poor and low-income households? What is the experience of poverty and economic insecurity in the Czech Republic?

  The search for replies to these questions is based on theories/academic knowledge summarized in chapter 2.3. and 2.4., an overview of existing debate about welfare in Czech Republic and my own research presented in chapter 3.1 and 3.2

- The second perspective focuses on public and policy debates about the social system targeted towards poor and low-income households. The emphasis is particularly on the discourse, the narrative practices that shape and legitimise recent changes towards greater retrenchment and control of benefit recipient:

  What causes the ongoing demand for retrenchment, particularly from regions with higher proportion of people facing economic insecurity? Why do low-income people do not claim greater protection? How did the situation in socially excluded localities become central to the debates about social protection?

  The search for replies to these questions is based on theories/academic knowledge summarized in chapter 2.5. and 2.6, an overview of existing debate about poverty in Czech Republic and my own empirical research, presented in chapter 3.1 and 3.3

- The third perspective is concerned with the overall effect of these processes, which I examine from the perspective of social citizenship:
  Can the social system react to the experience of precarity (*and other form of insecurities in current society) in a more inclusive way*? Why are the social systems targeted at poor and low-income households (and the way we think about them) important for social citizenship? What are the effects of stigmatisation and racialisation of these systems on the hierarchies and participation in society?
  The search for replies to these questions is based on theories/academic knowledge summarized in chapter 2.1. and 2.2. and reflects empirical finding from chapter 3. This is the main question upon which I reflect in the Conclusion.

The thesis is written as a compilation of three (to-be-)published texts (two articles and one chapter in a book) and a theoretical introduction and conclusion. Despite this, I have opted for a more traditional structure of the thesis.

Beside summarizing the main question (1.1) the *Introduction* also offers a brief overview of key terms (part 1.2) and overview of the methods (1.3). A more detailed methodology is included in each of the articles.

The second, *Theoretical and conceptual part* starts with a conceptualisation of the institution of citizenship (2.1), focusing particularly on the processes though which it can serve as a tool of domination or empowerment. Consequently, I look at the concept of social citizenship (2.2), its dimensions, summarizing debates about the importance of social citizenship for full participation in the society. Following parts focus on the systems of social protection targeted towards poor and low-income households. I first summarize how neoliberalism changed the approach to welfare and consequently construction of these systems (2.3). Afterwards I focus on the combined effects of welfare restructuring and increased precarity on the social and economic position of the poor and low in-come households (2.4), and on their position/status in the society (2.5) The last chapter (2.6) examines existing literature about the racialisation of poverty and its governance.

The third part *Development in the Czech Republic* first summarizes existing academic knowledge on the impact of neoliberalism on the Czech system of protection of poor and low-income households (3.1). However, the main emphasis here is on the empirical findings. In part 3.2. I examine the first specific question of this thesis (*Why is the construction of the*

system of social protection distant from the experience of the poor?), relying on findings published in the article *Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households*, complemented with some additional analysis of secondary data. In part 3.3 I search for the reply to the second specific question *(What causes the ongoing demand for welfare retrenchment?).* Here I rely on further empirical research as well as policy and discursive analysis and secondary data analysis, which had been published in the book chapter *On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia* and in the article *From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma*. Both texts are included in chapter 3.3, again complemented with some additional analysis.

In the *Conclusion* I summarize the replies to above mentioned questions. The reply to the last specific question (*How can the social system react to the experience of precarity in a more inclusive way?*) is a reflection about these findings from the perspective of social citizenship.

1.2 Key Terms

Before I move to the text, I consider it important to specify a few terms I am using. For some terms, there is no exact equivalent between Czech and English. For others, the term might not have a precisely defined meaning, or the meaning differs when it is used as a category of analysis from the meaning ascribed to it in public or media discourse. For the sake of brevity, I also decided to narrow down the meaning of a same key terms that refer to categories most often used in the text.

When I speak about *low-income* or *poor households*, I refer to people who experience economic insecurity and struggle to make ends meet. Unless specified, this category includes unemployed people, low-wage, and precarious workers. When I use the term *poverty,* I usually refer to the group of people whose economic situation corresponds to the situation described by Eurostat as "at risk of poverty or social exclusion" (Eurostat 2019c). However, in some cases, I view this term as a category in public discourse. I hope that these two meanings can be easily distinguished from the context.

When use I the term *social benefits targeted to low-income/poor households*, I usually mean tax-based non-contributory income- and sometimes means-tested benefits targeted at this group. In the article Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households, *welfare benefits* are used as an equivalent of previously described types of social benefits. *Social protection* refers to wider sets of measures, which might include social service, insurance-based benefits, etc.

I use the term *minimum income scheme* to describe the most basic support intended to ensure a minimum standard for households with no other (or insufficient) means (Frazer, Marlier 2016). In the Czech context, the minimum income scheme legislation (*pomoc v hmotné nouzi)* is usually translated as *social assistance,* a term I also use in the text. For the Czech social support system of low-income (working) households, I use the term *social support*, a nearly exact translation of the Czech term (*státní socialní podpora*). Unless specified, I am not speaking about insurance-based benefits (unemployment support, etc.), and support for elderly, health-related benefits, and parental leave.

Over-indebtedness refers to the situation when a person is, for an extended period, unable to make payments related to commitments (loans, rent, health insurance, etc.) (Dubois et al 2020). In the Czech context, this mainly includes people facing *debt enforcement* / *income*

and property seizure (*exekuce*) or those in the process of *debt relief* (*insolvence*). *Wage garnishment* is used as an equivalent to *wage seizure* (*srážky ze mzdy*).

I have also struggled how to label democratic countries with an advanced welfare state that have been the main focus / field of research of most authors, to which I refer in this thesis: European and North American countries, Australia and New Zealand. For the sake of brevity and clarity for reader, I decided to use the term of *European-North American area* referring to common cultural/intellectual and historical experience, but I am aware that this term is reductive, particularly in replicating colonial past of Australia and New Zealand.

1.3 Sources of Data and Overview of Methods

1.3.1 Theories and literature

I build on three key streams of literature (which often interlap): First, the social and public policy literature on the changes of the welfare state in the context of neoliberalism. These texts are often most concerned with its effectivity and the impact of social policies. They provide an important overview of changes in the context of historical and theoretical development of the welfare state as well as of the increasingly precarious labour market in the global capitalism. However, particularly more comparative literature often overlooks or underrepresents the topic of race, which is highly relevant to my thesis. Second, I turn to critical sociological/anthropological approaches that follow a similar process but focus more on the way we think about welfare and the categories that are created in the process. These approaches are often more sensitive to the topics of class and race. But I find them particularly interesting when they speak about different modes of legitimisations underpinning morality, hierarchies, and modes of governance. Third, I turn to the literature on the condition of minorities, particularly on the position of Roma in European society – which provides an important insight into how welfare systems are intertwined with the governance of Roma. These texts are usually not that much concerned with other groups of the population, nor with the social policy debates about welfare.

Most of the authors focus on countries of the European-North American area – European countries, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia – as countries with a long and mutually inspired history of debates about welfare protection, that had established a universal (in sense of covering all inhabitants) system of social protection after the Second World War. There is slightly greater emphasis on the Anglo-Saxon countries (liberal welfare states in Esping-Andersen (1991) categorisation), which has several reasons. First, my core concept of social citizenship had been first developed by a British sociologist, and consequently is more often revisited in the research of English-speaking countries (especially Great Britain). Second, many changes that had been introduced in the past decade (or two) in EU countries, had become part of welfare in Anglo-Saxon countries a decade or two earlier (see chapter 2.3 and 2.4 for more details). This also means, there is more research and critical reflection on the impact of these developments. Further, when I follow the academic debate on welfare and position of the poor/low-income households in these countries, I find that they are closer to

the Czech experience, particularly in the weak position of framing that would provide an alternative to neoliberal approaches[2] (despite being shaped by a very different historical and institutional experience). Still, I am aware that I am partly replicating the dominant position of English-speaking countries in current academic research.

1.3.2 My own positioning

During most of the time that I was working on my PhD, I worked as a researcher and analyst. Or, to be more precise, I combined my academic career with applied research as well as with active involvement in the public debate on poverty and welfare in the Czech Republic, participating in various kinds of policy-making debates and commenting on these topics for media. (I attach overview of these activities in the Appendix).

This had of course shaped this project. I usually combined several project-based jobs for both governmental and non-governmental institutions. Most of these projects have been closely related to the topic of my PhD, allowing me thus to gain in-depth understanding of ongoing processes, agents involved in them and their impact. The outcomes of this research are not included in this thesis directly, but when they are relevant, I refer to them in the texts, as they served as an important primary source of data.

My understanding of the studied issues has also been influenced by multiple occasions where I had the opportunity to present and discuss these findings in public debate – these included personal meetings with policy and nongovernmental actors on municipal, national and EU level, participation in public debates and conferences, interviews for media etc. Further, my approach has been shaped by active involvement in debates and observation in the working groups on the social benefits system, initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, membership in municipal housing committees and long-term involvement in the Minimum Decent Wage Platform as core member responsible for conceptualisation. (See Appendix for an overview of these activities)

In all of these events, I have been in the position of an expert. This does not imply neutrality. I have often been the person who brought the most data to these debates, but I also offered

[2] Compared to France or South European countries with longer tradition of public mobilisation or stronger position and involvement of trade unions in this area, or North European countries with tradition of social-democratic welfare states.

interpretations and introduced a more critical standpoint. These debates provided important feedback for my reading of the social reality. I often mentally returned to these debates, trying to understand motivation and interests of different participants and reflect upon my own position. I believe, that these reflections allowed me to better formulate and critically evaluate my research questions and perspectives.

1.3.3 Overview of methods

The empirical findings of this dissertation rely on a combination of different methods. Such an approach allowed me to captured a wide range of perspectives and analytical contexts – analyses included in-depth interviews with welfare recipients and low-income workers, municipal and national actors, social service providers or employers, case studies of municipal policies, quantitative analysis of data about unemployment and social benefits payment, content and discursive analysis of legislative changes and modelling of financial incentives for work.

The following list provides an overview of the main source of data and methods that had been used to collect and analyse them. I'd be able to identify multiple data source that would like to go more in-depth in my analyses, as well as multiple fields where I would like to spend more time (I particularly miss not having more opportunities for research in Moravian post-industrial regions). In the course of research, I also gained better methodological insight and sensitivity as well as detailed knowledge of many topics, allowing me to better formulate questions, and to create a feeling of safety and openness in different, often unequal situations.

Nonetheless, I believe that the sources below provided me with a complex set of perspectives and understandings of the analysed topic.

1) **Qualitative interviews and focus groups with low wage workers and benefit recipients and social and public service providers**

The article Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households included in the thesis, is based on interview welfare recipients (30 people), social workers, Labour office employee, employers (17 people). Research had been conducted in 2 periphery regions of the Czech Republic (North Moravia, North Bohemia). A more detailed methodology is included in the article.

Further, I refer in the text to other published research, focusing on the position of low wage/ precarious workers, benefit recipients and social and public service providers (including Labour office and municipal employees, NGOs) that I have conducted or participated in during my PhD studies. The following list provides an overview of the most important of them. More detailed methodology is included in each of the studies.

- Qualitative research with Czech and Ukrainian workers in retail: 7 interviews with Czech workers, 7 with Ukrainian workers, 2 interviews with trade unions representatives. Prague, Pardubice. 2015-2016.
  More details in Bek, Čaněk, Kobová, Kučera, Trlifajová (2019)
- Qualitative research and focus groups with people with experience of long-term unemployment / working on public works (*veřejně prospěšné práce*): 12 interviews with local professionals (Labour Offices, social workers, municipal employee), 18 interviews with people working on public works, 3 focus groups with people on public works and benefit recipients. Prague, 1 municipality in North Bohemain, 2 municipalities in East Bohemia. 2017-2018.
  More details in Władyniak, Trlifajová, Kudrnáčová (2019)
- Qualitative research with management of public works (*veřejně prospěšné práce*): 25 semi-structured interviews with middle and lower management of public works. 2 large municipalities, 2 middle size, 5 small municipalities in different regions of Czechia.
  More details in Gajdoš, Trlifajová, Decker (2020)
- Qualitative research with precarious workers during COVID pandemics:16 interviews with precarious workers, 4 interviews with social service providers. Prague. 2020-2021
  More details in Svobodová, Trlifajová (2021)

2) Microsimulations of financial motivations for employment

Several models of financial incentives for work are part of the article Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households included in the thesis. The models were based on the Czech system of social benefits (social support, social assistance), tax and debt collection legislation. More detailed methodology is included in the article.

I have conducted another, more detailed analysis of financial incentives for employment in 2018. The study emphasised the impact of debt enforcement on the income of low-wage households. More details in Trlifajová, Fejfar, Pospíšil (2018).

3) Case studies in the Czech economic periphery

The case studies and studies conducted in or for Czech municipalities on which I had participated in the past decade are not directly included in the thesis, but I use them as an important secondary source of data.

The most important source had been an analysis of zero tolerance policies in Litvínov and Duchcov, conducted in 2015. Field research included 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with people from municipalities, social workers, NGOs, Labour Offices, police, 8 semi-structured interviews with inhabitants of the "socially excluded localities", 23 short (street) interview with inhabitants of the municipalities and participatory observations. The study included also extensive desk research. More details in Trlifajová et al (2016).

In the following years I have followed the development in Litvínov and Duchcov through media and occasional visits. I have conducted smaller scale desk research of municipal policies targeted towards Roma in preparation for writing the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia (part 3.3). Selected documents are included in the literature of this chapter.

I have further participated on following analyses:

- Case study of municipal employment in association of actors in small municipalities (Místní akční skupina): 14 interviews with employees, 5 interviews with social workers and management. MAS Brdy Vltava 2019
  More details in Todorová, Dvořáková, Trlifajová (2020)
- Other applied research projects in other Czech municipalities, without published outcomes are included in Appendix

4) Secondary analysis of statistical data on poverty, economic insecurity and employment in the Czech Republic

Secondary analysis of statistical data on poverty, economic insecurity and employment in the Czech Republic (Eurostat, Czech statistical office, thematic analysis and research) had been partly used in all published texts included in this thesis. A more detailed debate on measurement of the poverty is included in the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and

Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia (part 3.3). I have further participated in the following analyses of statistical data:

- Statistical data on unemployment "10 years after financial crisis". Detailed analysis on registered unemployment and social benefits in the years 2008-2018 (regional data, gender, age, children, education).
  More in Trlifajová Hoření Samec, Pospíšil (2019)
- Statistical data on unemployment and social benefit claiming after first year of COVID. More in Trlifajová, Chrudimská (2021)

5) Content analysis of welfare related legislation 2001-2021

Content analysis of social assistance legislation is part of the article From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma (part 3.3). More detailed methodology is included in the article. I have further participated in the following legislative analyses:

- Overview of social support scheme, employment, debt collection and taxation related legislation for the above-mentioned analysis of financial motivation of employment (Trlifajová et al 2018).
- Analysis of construction of ceilings on housing cost within Czech housing benefit schemes (Trlifajová, Kučera 2019)
- A study mapping history of debt collection in the Czech Republic between 2001 and 2021 (Habl, Trlifajová et al 2021)
- Analysis of Czech employment strategies and policies (Trlifajová, Buchlerová, Szénássy 2019, Novák, Podlaha, Trlifajová 2021)
- Content analysis of Czech strategies of social inclusion for the chapter 3.2 in this thesis

6) Discourse analysis of parliamentary debates on social assistance

Policy narrative of parliamentary debates of social assistance legislation (2013-2021) is part of the article From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma. More detailed methodology is included in the article.

2 THEORETICAL / CONCEPTUAL PART

2.1 Thinking about (Social) Citizenship

There are two main approaches to the social citizenship – some authors use this term to refer to a wider social content of citizenship, to emphasize changing patterns of participation and belonging, forms of social engagement and mobilisation in current society (Ellison 2000, Lister 2007). Others, and this is a predominant approach between welfare state scholar, use this term in a narrower sense – they are referring to a complex of social rights, materialised in "welfare provision" (education, health and social service, income protection schemes such as pensions or social benefits, labour market protection, housing etc). These are often related to taxation or more generally redistribution systems which enables it (King Waldron 1988).

However, even when the social citizenship is primarily concerned with a welfare provision, it is also distinct from it. It is concerned not only with outcomes, but also with social practices and process through which the welfares systems are negotiated (Dean 2015). The social citizenship is also distinct from social rights, as the focus includes a wider set of norms and process in which these rights are negotiated and upon which they are conditional. Welfare provision, such as social protection system, can be seen as embodiment of these processes.

The term citizenship emphasises the central role of the state - or other governing bodies in a more localised or globalized forms of citizenship - and the state-citizen relation, as an area where the rights and duties as well as their embodiments are negotiated (this of course does not imply that these are the only agents involved). Citizenship is thus (usually[3]) not universal, but embedded in the process of boundary-making, inclusionary and exclusionary practises of membership. Such sociologically informed approach to citizenship emphasises not only its content, but also practices, meanings, or shared values behind them. Further, the emphasis is not on their static definition, but analysis of processes that shapes them - contestations of norms, disruption or confirmation of power relations and social hierarchies, etc.

In this chapter, I will examine the implications and analytical sensibilities which are enabled by approaching the (social) citizenship as both legal and social institution, and an institution

[3] The universalistic aspect / claim is of course present in the debates about social right, more so in the current globalised world, where multiplicity of belongings is become more common. However, full citizenship has historically been and still is categorical, not universal, accorded to different social groups at different times (Morgen, Maskovsky 2003).

that can both legitimise control and enable empowerment and disruption. The focus here is particularly on the question of claim-making (when can citizenship empower people to make claims?) and control (when, under which conditions does it legitimise control)?

2.1.1 Beyond citizenship as formal status

For the purpose of this thesis, I do not approach citizenship or citizenship right in strictly legalistic terms, which creates dichotomy between those outside (non-members deprived of rights) and inside, implying that membership per se allows full participation and access to the rights. While formal membership is critical, legal citizenship does not make a citizenry equal (Cohen 2009), nor does it guarantee inclusion. The rights, practices, everyday experiences of citizenship often do not correspond to the formal status of citizens (Gonzales, Sigona, 2017). As had been repeatedly shown by migration scholars, citizenship duties and rights can be accessed by those who do not have legal status of citizens. Taxation or access to health insurance for undocumented migrants in the U.S. can be seen as a prime example of these processes. Similarly, those who have formal status of citizenship, can still be deprived of their rights. An illustration of this can be an overindebted person, who's ownership rights can be limited.

To avoid this dichotomy, I rely on authors who approach the citizenship as both *legal* and *social* institution (Gonzales, Sigona 2017). While the legal aspect of citizenship is important, citizenship is not a static institution. It is a social institution, because its content is constantly contested, a process which is deeply embedded in the social context and hierarchies. In the process of negation of citizenship, these hierarchies are constantly performed and reiterated (Anderson, 2015). It is a multidimensional institution, and the multiple dimensions that "can be conferred or claimed in partial and asymmetric ways" (Gonzales, Sigona 2017:13). Such process can be both enabling for those involved in it, a process of inclusion, empowerment and claim-making. It can also tighten existing hierarchies and modes of governance, legitimising an imposition of control, discipline, or exclusion. Using the words of Isin (2009), citizenship is as a dynamic institution of both domination and empowerment.

This dynamic – both claim-making and imposition of control – closely reflects values and norms of a society. Modern states often portray themselves as "communities of values", comprised of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour (Anderson, Hughes, 2015). Holders (and claimants) of citizenship right are expected to be "a

bona fide member of political community" (Turner 1997). Struggles over citizenship, delimitation of its borders and conditionality of its content, are not only questions of access to material protection, statuses, or scarce resources, but they are reflecting and shaping identity, social norms, civic society culture, etc. In this sense, the citizenship is not only a relationship between state and an individual, but more of a "total relationship" reflecting identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging (Werbner and Yuval Davis in Lister 2007).

2.1.2 Community of values and hierarchisation of citizenship

Full citizenship is not guaranteed by a legal position, but it is more a conditional status bestowed on those who are perceived as full members of a community. This implies dictions which go beyond legal status dichotomy (insider-outsider), hierarchies between different groups that are perceived as more or less deserving. In the hierarchies of citizenship, economic status/class often intersects with race, gender, age, family status or ethnicity, further categorising those deemed as un/deserving. In this sense Bridget Anderson (2013: 5) describes citizenship as a *"membership in a community of value",* emphasises both the collective dimension of citizenship and how it the status and perception of membership deeply embedded in the norms and values of society. This is not merely an intellectual game of attempts to define norms or culture of a society. The perception of "deservingness" of membership can alter the legal boundaries: on the one hand, allow access to some rights to non-citizens, who are seen as abiding by the norms and values of membership, such as access to certain areas of social protection for foreign workers, based on their perceived contribution (insurance and tax payments). It also allows exclusion and imposition of control or disciplination measures on its member, who are seen as breaking the norms or "not contributing" to the community.

Citizenship as formally/legal status does not make citizens equal. In order to illustrate the *internal hierarchisation of citizenship*, Anderson (2013) proposes an analytical distinction between "good" and "failed" citizens (and "non-citizen"). *Good citizens* are often defined in relation to those outside the community of value, non-citizens and "failed" citizens. They are those 'manifesting the values of the community and valued by the community" (Anderson, 2013: 5). Only as such can they have full access to the rights and protections. On the other side are *failed citizens*, people with legal status, yet perceived as '"incapable of, or fail to live

up to, liberal ideas". Such a person consequently does "not have rights, because he does not have values and economic worth" (Anderson, 2013: 5). In current society, the failed citizen can be personalised in the image of criminals, benefit scroungers, etc.

Failed citizens dos not only fail to live up to the ideals of the society. They also (allegedly) threaten social stability and order of society and endanger its moral values. In this sense, their "failure to live up to the ideals" is not only an individual, but a collective problem, endangering the whole society. It is not only the transgression of the norms (and rules), but the fear, image of common threat, that allow the introduction of regimes of control and disciplination towards people perceived as "failing". Society tends to be tolerant of transgression or abuses of the rule of law towards these people (Fassin 2014). Those who are (perceived as) transgressing the norms can and may be deprived of some of their citizenship rights. They may no longer be treated as "deserving" them.

Yet, there is no easy dichotomy between good and failed citizens. Anderson (2013) also introduces the category of *tolerated citizens* to describe those with legal citizenship, who feel that they are at risk of failure/non-belonging. To prove their own status in society, people in such position feel that they need to dissociate themselves from those excluded from the community of value. In attempt to prove their own deservingness, they are keen to support the discursive distinctions as well as restrictive measures against the failed citizens (or non-citizens), even such that might have negative impact on them. They do so to prove their membership in the "community of value", their "deservingness", compliance with the rules of the society. As Anderson puts it, tolerated citizen "often become popular guardians of "good citizenship".

In this distinction, Anderson shows how is the full citizenship conditional upon perceived compliance to certain norms and values of the community, legitimizing exclusionary practices and marginalisation of certain groups in the society. How this can be used to deprive those who are perceived as unable to live to the expectation of their basic rights. And how this process can be supported by many of those who are themselves struggling.

2.1.3 Right to make claims – challenging the norms of citizenship

Yet, citizenship is a *dynamic* institution of both domination and *empowerment.* While underlying norms can cement and deepen divisions in the society, citizenship can also be

used as a tool to make claims and re-establish existing interpretations of belonging and norms, values and expectations that underpin them.

Isin (2009) speaks about "acts of citizenship" and "activist citizenship". These are distinguished from traditional sites of citizenship, such as voting, which are (mostly) accessible only to members, and their enactment is happening within existing rules/institutions of the society. For Isin, the activist citizenship is disrupting pre-existing understanding of citizenship, redefining its norms. It is performed by actors who are perceived as outsiders or not full insiders. In a way similarly to Anderson, Isin points out, that being a citizen always means "being more than an insider", that it requires mastery of modes and forms of conduct that are "appropriate to being an insider". Those outside can either adopt these modes and forms – or attempt to challenge and transform them, thereby transforming understanding and conditions of being a citizen. Isin's "acts of citizenship" are struggles for recognition (and redistribution). It is in these acts that people, often those in marginal positions, outsiders, constitute themselves as citizens, as members of the society. They are – to reinterpret Hannah Arendt's concept of "right to have rights" – enacting "themselves as citizens by usurping *the right to claim rights*" (Isin 2009: 381). Isin illustrated the process on the struggle of French "sans papiers" for recognition, focusing thus on those who find themselves outside legal boundaries of citizenship. However, as I will discuss in the conclusion of my thesis, I find the emphasis on claim-making, call for recognition particularly useful for the analysis of internal hierarchies of citizenship.

The emphasis on the process of claim-making allows to shift attention from fixed categories of membership to the struggles in which they are contested. The puzzle here is no longer who is a citizen, but what makes a citizen. Similarly, Ellison (2000) approaches citizenship as "proactive engagement", where social actors are able to voice and exploit their *demands for recognitions*, transform their position in a particular area of the public space[4].

Yuval-Davis (2011) introduced the term "politics of belonging", to analyse the project that are either challenging and maintaining the boundaries of membership (who is involved in

[4] This has a strong gender aspect, which might not be that relevant for my analysis, but I still consider it important to mention. The exercise of political agency in public spaces is privileging the attitudes and engagements of some, particularly male, but to some extend also people of colour or different sexuality (Lister 2007). Particularly feminist scholar emphasised the need to see beyond public/politized space as arenas of citizenship, and also explore the political weight of everyday life as an "arena for the contestation and transformations of dominant, often repressive, modalities of citizenship "(Dickinson et al. 2008: 105).

belonging, in being member of a community), "constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects" (Yuval-Davis 2011:10). Importantly, she also points to different facets of these process, bring attention not only to social locations in which they are situated, already discussed norms and values, but also to identifications and emotional attachments, identity narratives, which are becoming particularly important the times of increased insecurity.

2.2 Social Citizenship as an Outcome and Condition of Democracy

The first chapter examined how is the understanding of citizenship embedded in the norms, values and hierarchies of society, in the second part I look on the content ascribed to social citizenship. Social citizenship is a deeply normative concepts, emphasising certain values and norms as crucial for the society. It a historically embedded concept, which gained it form and prevalence less than hundred years.

There is a consensus between welfare state scholars, that after World War II "social" dimension become integral, even taken for-granted part of citizenship in most European and North American states. Social order of many modern post-war societies was formed around "quasi constitutional" and/or tacit social contract (Roche 1992). Post-World War II "ideal of social citizenship" is a crucial point of reference for many ongoing debates on the changing character of welfare provision. For some authors, this ideal is seen through the lenses of changes of the past decades (neoliberal/or shaped by neoliberalism), emphasising thus what had been disappearing from welfare protection, how did the neoliberalism changed both the content of social rights as well the way we think about them (or to be more precise, about balance between social right and duties). These debates are very important to understand current trends, and I will examine them in the following chapter. But before doing so, I propose in this chapter to have a deeper look on the premises that shaped this "ideal" of social citizenship, which is now taken as one of the pillars of current democratic societies.

In this chapter, I will examine the premises and reasons, normative justifications which are inherent in the approaches that consider social dimension an integral part or even condition of full citizenship and collective responsibility of the government. I am particularly examining approaches which go beyond understating of social citizenship as a tool for reduction of social inequalities and maintenance of social peace. I am trying to understand, why social rights are considered important for full citizenship. The emphasis here is on the role social citizenship may play for full participation in the society. In other words, why is social citizenship considered important for a democratic state, in which forms.

These premises are crucial for understanding the effects of neoliberal shift in the provision of welfare on society, which will be further examined in the following part of this thesis as well as reactions to this process.

2.2.1 Equality of status and participation in capitalist society

The post-war understanding of social citizenship had been strongly shaped by Marshall's work, particularly the text Citizenship and Social Class. Barely any author writing about social rights, citizenship can proceed to do so, without referring to Marshall's thoughts[5]. In this famous description of the development of the welfare state, Marshall (1950) examines the link between access to social rights and expansion of citizenship rights, claiming that the existence of social rights is conditional upon previous devolvement of civic and political rights. Many find flaws in his evolutionary approach to the development of civic, political and finally social right (for it attempt to universalism while centred on Anglo-Saxon context, for overlooking other than class differences, particularly gender or race, for overall historical optimism etc).

But, while the exact content and process that shaped social citizenship might be main complex than what Marshall described, the main importance of Marshall for current debates about social citizenship lies in shaping our *understanding of social rights* and their role: "the way in which welfare provision ought to be viewed, intimating an argument about how it might be defended" King Waldron (1988: 422). There is a long line of authors which shaped the understanding of welfare state in the post-war (mostly European) democratic countries. Marshall's contribution lies not that much in understanding the construction and mechanism of the welfare state, but in proposing a framing of its importance for democratic society. He brought to – I even thought about using the world established in – the academic debate the understanding that social rights are both as a precondition and component of democratic citizenship (and a responsibility of a state).

In this sense, I consider it important to emphasise once more the difference between social citizenship and social protection/welfare as an infrastructure. The existence of system of social protection can be a part of state policies, without necessary becoming a "component" of democracy. Bismarckian welfare state aimed at protecting (part of) its inhabitants – but welfare had been introduced with the aim to maintain control, a tool for conservation of existing hierarchies, a mode of governance (Olson 2006).

[5] However, it is important to say, that Marshall's understanding of citizenship is embedded in wider debates, particularly of interwar period (Titmuss, Tawney, Beveridge).

Marshall approached social rights as a necessary compensation for the inequalities produced and reproduced by the modern capitalist state, reducing the level of class struggle and antagonism. However, social protection is not a goal per se. The importance of social rights is not only in improving the quality of life of individuals but also in contributing to the quality of public life and the practices of citizenship. Within the framework of social citizenship, social rights (a system of social protection), is a mean to an end. The idea is that social rights are crucial for a democratic state as they ought to safeguard equality of status between citizens and their full participation in society. In this sense the idea of social citizenship as precondition and component of democracy implies a link between welfare provision and effective (democratic) participation of every citizen.

However, and this is important for many current debates, this approach to also treats socio-economic structure of capitalism as an uncontested context of welfare state.

2.2.2 Economic precondition of solidarity and inclusion

The acknowledgement of the importance of social rights is often linked with the acknowledgement of negative impact of inequality on mutual trust and solidarity. Social rights (welfare protection) are thus legitimised as an important ingredient of solidarity, contributing to social cohesion on the level of nation state, status equality (King Waldron 1988, Seeman 2021, Laruffa 2022). They should minimise individuals' risks of suffering poverty, gross inequality or social exclusion in modern capitalist societies (Roche 2002).

However, there is also danger in this line of arguing - if social rights are seen instrumentally as tool to mitigate inequality, those in need (or those subjected to inequality) can be seen only in the terms of subjects upon whom the rules and policies are applied (King Waldron 1988, Laruffa 2022). If the goal of social rights is a full participation in the society, the role of social citizenship needs to go beyond ensuring social peace, a quiet of "discontent masses".

One of the core historical exclusionary practices of citizenship (next to gender or race) had been lack of wealth (King Waldron 1988, Isin 2009). While wealth should legally have no impact on citizenship rights in modern democratic state (for the insiders[6]), many authors

[6] The situation is quite different when we focus to those who do not have legal citizenship status. There is a considerable literature on the hierarchisation of the status of migrant, which shows how

emphasise that certain economic stability is a precondition for full participation in the society. In this approach, the provision of social rights intertwined with political and civic rights: if citizenship attempts to be truly inclusive in all its aspect, we need to put everyone "in the socio-economic position that we have reason to believe citizens ought to be in" (King Waldron 1988: 431). The understanding that *full participation in society has economic precondition* had been theorised by many authors going back to Marx to relatively recent thinking like Nancy Fraser's participatory parity concept or Nussbaum's and Sen's and capability approach (Lister 2007, Fraser 2020), and this line of thinking can be traced to social citizenship theories. The argument is quite simple – a person who struggles to cover his or her basic need does not (and cannot) have capacity to engage in public and political life.

Particular attention is in this sense given to the dependence of individual on the labour market (and consequent vulnerability to exploitation). This approach derives from Karl Polanyi understanding of labour as "fictitious commodity", one which cannot be (unlike other commodities) separated from its owner, cannot be withheld from the market when the conditions or prices are more agreeable – unless its owner have alternative means of subsistence. Welfare, particularly income protection scheme, should provide such alternative (Dean 2015). The notion of decommodification of labour, famously used by Esping-Andersen as one of the criteria for comparative welfare states studies, refers to "the degree to which individuals or families can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation" (Esping-Andersen 1990:37). When welfare protection – and in this case particularly protection in case of unemployment of illness – is constructed not only survival but preserving social status and maintaining existing living standards (Fleckenstein 2012), it also provides individual with a greater negotiating power / stronger position on the labour market.

King Waldron (1988) also emphasises that welfare should provide security of expectations – social security expectation radically affects the risks people think they can take in making decisions, an aspect, which is not so often emphasised by welfare scholars. This aspect become important in view of increased insecurity characteristic for current society. As shown by Isin (2004), once we transfer the responsibility to manage them primary to and individual,

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important is wealth and ascribed economic value for the (legal) access of the „Outsiders" to citizenship right. (Bosniak 2008).

with limited ability to assess and manage risks, such experience considerably influences the choice of and individual, leading to imposition of new modes of self-governance[7].

2.2.3 Equal status and recognition

However, ensuring equal status and participation does not depend only on the level of economic security/independence. As I have discussed in previous part, equal position – and ability to claim citizenship rights – is also shaped by the feeling of recognition (or ability to claim such recognition). As emphasised by Lister (2007: 53) "last thing people living in poverty want is to be seen and treated as different or "other", as they are in dominant discourses of poverty".

Once we understand the recognition as crucial part of citizenship, it sheds a new light on the "Marshallian" line of arguing, that it is crucial that *social rights are status-based*. This does not imply unconditionality. There had always been a balance between rights and duties in the systems of social protection. However, social support provided within the framework of citizenship stand in sharp opposition to poor laws and charity (King Waldron 1988, Parsell et al 2022). Under the poor laws, the recipients often lost their citizenship status, while charity embodies an unequal position of donor (with moral credit and right to decide over criteria of support) and recipient. Both these approaches are also associated with stigma, which impacts both the social position and self-esteem of the recipients. Status based right is an attempt of shift in power positions, to create more equal relations.

Even more importantly - compared to charity or contract-based protection - status based rights allow to step out of the framing of individual failure, moral responsibility. Within the citizenship framework, the status-based support can be framed *as response to a social - thus collective - problem* rather than a personal problem, easily reframed as a failure. By providing protection both from "economic rationale of contract" as well as "moral rationale of charity" status-based rights should not deprive its recipient from recognition and thus full participation in the society (Parsell et al 2022, Laruffa 2022). As described by Lister (2007), even in everyday interactions, meaningful citizenship cannot exist without dignity.

[7] The impact on increased insecurity and reliance on the private social provision is briefly discussed in chapter 2.3, in the part of financialisation.

2.2.4 Social citizenship as a process

This emphasis on both economic precondition and recognition is important if we remember that social citizenship is not static set of rights, but a "constantly performed and reiterated" process. This aspect had been present already in Marshall's original conception ("growth [of social rights] is stimulated both by the struggle to win those rights and by their enjoyment when won", Marshall 1950), but it seems that it attracts more attention only recently.

The emphasis on the processual, participatory aspects of citizenship is discussed by Olson (2006) or Laruffa (2022), when they try to in their attempt to reinterpret the importance welfare (in case of Olson) and social citizenship (Laruffa) in the light of the development in past decade. Both these authors refer to Habermas "co-originality thesis", when they seek to explain the importance of involvement of social actors in the process of struggle and negotiation of social rights. They show that when those who are affected are involved in the process, social rights are not only more effective, but the process itself – i.e., public involvement in the contestations over the content – provides them with greater legitimacy.

In line with previous chapter, this implies that social citizenship belongs to the "realm of agency" and the logic of "acting" rather than to the field of "ownership" and the logic of "having" (Laruffa 2022: 4). In this sense, social citizenship cannot be only consummated, but requires practise, need to be claimed and reinvented in this process. The protective aspect of citizenship is in this sense only a mean to an end. As the social reality of our everyday lives' changes, social citizenship should allow all – and particularly those most impacted by this process – to enter the political arena, shape the public discourse on the needs and rights.

Returning to Isin notion of activist citizenship*, I understand social citizenship not only as promotion of social goals, process, in which right (and duties) are negotiates, but also as a (dynamic) infrastructure, which creates a narrative in which people can formulate their claims as members of the society.* Social citizenship refers to rights, but also shapes them.

2.2.5 Limits of post-WWII citizenship ideal

It is important to note, that the above-described post-World War II ideal of social citizenship had never been fully achieved. The exact content and implementation of social citizenship differed widely between different countries, reflecting their historical experience, institutional

tradition and social and economic structure, as had been most famously described by Esping-Andersen (1991).

While the extend of post war social citizenship widely differs in its implementation, some of the limits, exclusionary practices are embedded in the concept per se. Post-war welfare state had been constructed around the ideal of full time employed (white) male breadwinner. The *social rights are attached to the idea of paid work*, conditional upon it - as a worker man is entitled to social insurance. By ensuring access to paid work, the (Keynesian) state also provides opportunity to gain right to full social protection. Social reproduction work is thus rendered invisible and or dependent. Women - as mothers - are more often receiving (tax-based) benefits (Morgen, Makovsky 2003). Full time worker ideal also contributes to exclusion and replication of marginal status of people of colour, who more often find themselves in the marginal position on the labour market.

Marshall emphasised the class and class-based divisions, but otherwise he treated society as homogenous (Turner 1997). By focusing on class and paid employment, the post-war ideal tends to overlook and reinforce gendered and racial hierarchies. Olson (2006) uses the term "labour market paradigma", to emphasise the primacy of protecting workers from vulnerabilities of the market inherent in the predominant construction of welfare state - while overlooking other axis of inequality.

2.3 Rethinking Social Protection of the Poor under Neoliberalism

The current understanding of the role of the welfare protection – and social citizenship in general – has been strongly shaped by the rising importance of neoliberal ideas since the last two decades of the 20th century. Neoliberalism is a term that can refer to multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings (Venugopal, 2015), yet it often refers to primacy of labour market solutions, deregulation, privatisation, proclaimed ideals of small government, emphasis on economic efficiency, austerity. Some aspects are more emphasised by the authors that are focusing on welfare: individualisation of responsibility, imposition of market discipline, economization of the social, normalisation of inequality as a condition of economic prosperity, normalisation of unequal power relation and concertation of wealth and power (Roche 2002, Morgen, Maskovsky 2003, Isin 2004, Soss, Fording, Schram 2011, Fleckeeinstein 2012, Woolford Nelund 2013, Berry 2015, Turner 2016, Laruffa 2022).

While originating in economic theory, the term it has been used across authors from different discipline (Venugopal, 2015). We can analyse the ideas, the content and forms they take, narratives that are used to legitimise it. Yet, for the purpose of this text, I narrow my focus to welfare state scholarship. In this area, I am interested in critical approaches to neoliberalism as an ideological framework, which had appeal for politicians across the ideological spectrum. This does not imply a coherent set of outcomes, as the emphasis, priorities and outcomes differ, often embedded in the local, national contexts (van Baar 2011). My focus is not that much on concrete implementations, but more on the changing approaches, framing, understanding of the social reality. What I try to capture is not a concrete program, but an ideological shift, which impacts political thinking about welfare / policy making across political spectrum[8].

While being careful about the simplification centre-periphery diffusion of neoliberal ideal, I believe we should not underestimate the impact of (more leftist) policies of 1990s and 2000s on normalising the neoliberal shift in thinking about welfare. Despite the tendency to link neoliberalism to welfare retrenchment, once we focus is on neoliberalism as a way of

[8] For this reason, I also do not primarily engage with different categorisations of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, Hall and Soskice). Some authors (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth and Chung 2017) also emphasise growing convergence in the approaches of European welfare states in the past decade, due to dismantling of the structures that previous sustained different welfare regimes.

thinking about social policies, many authors observe a continuity between new labour and other policies[9] that attempt to re-legitimize welfare, and approaches ascribed to right wing politicians. Such continuity can be traced even in policies which seem to counter welfare retrenchment (Dwyer 2002, Barbier Fargion 2004, Jenson 2009, Fleckenstein 2012, Edmiston 2017, Laruffa 2022).

In line with the focus on social citizenship, I have written this part with particular interest in the ways neoliberalism changes the perception of the impact of welfare on the society. I examine how it consequently changes its construction and approach the recipients. The emphasis is on the welfare targeted towards unemployed and low-income households, as they are in the centre of attention of the research in the thesis.

2.3.1 "Welfare dependency" as a core problem

Neoliberal approach to welfare had been shaped by the U.S. conservative academic research in the 1980s/early 1990s. These authors contributed to the centrality of the "welfare dependency" image in the public policy discourse. The idea that benefits do not alleviate poverty, but change the behaviour of the poor, either as rational utility maximisers (Ch. Murray) or due to a lack of efficacy, experience, and aspiration (L. Mead), strongly resonated between the general public as well as policymakers.

This is a crucial shift in the approach to welfare. *The tools for fighting poverty* are no longer approached as cure but as a *potential cause of poverty and social problems* (Jensen and Tyler 2015). "Social consumption" is labelled as a problem per se, the benefits solely replicating income are labelled as "passive" (despite conditions of past work experience and/or job-seeking activities they had included), and long-term benefit claiming is labelled as "dependency". Sommers and Block (2005) speak about the reappearance of the "rhetoric of perversity": the predominance of a narrative that when welfare is hurting the poor by creating dependence, denying it "is not cruel but compassionate", pointing to continuity with a historical regime of control of poor (see also Anderson 2013 or Soss, Fording, Schram 2011).

Such way of thinking established a strong association between the welfare subject and „self-interested wrong-doing, which requires correction by power-holding others whose intentions

[9] Particularly so-called "social investment" policies.

are not open to scrutiny“ (Wright 2016:3). Despite no strong evidence for these assumptions (Sjöberg et al. 2010, Dean, Taylor-Gooby (2014), they legitimised the idea that benefits need to come with strict work requirements and the behaviour of the poor requires regulation. The centrality of the active involvement of the unemployed and focus on the individual motivations and approaches is symbolically reflected in the buzzword “activation”.

Neoliberalism is a narrative with strong emphasis on individual freedom and minimal state. Yet, the shift it brought to the policies targeted towards unemployed a low-income household is distinctly illiberal and paternalistic (Dean 2007). Once there is a consensus that (overgenerous) benefit cause social problem, it is not that difficult to legitimize welfare cuts. However, the understanding of welfare as corrupting also facilitates and legitimises also increased *state interventions in personal, social and economic affairs of the poor*. The retrenchment in amounts and number of recipients is paralleled by expansion in surveillance and control (MacLeavy 2016), Soss, Fording, Schram (2011: 23), speak about a “rise of the new paternalism”.

Social policies become an economic and moral project (Laruffay 2022), in which there is a lot of concern for “activation” in sense of labour market inclusion, while concern for actual democratic participation is limited. As described famously by Wacquant (2010:5), „New priority given to duties over rights, sanctions over support, the stern rhetoric of the ′obligations of citizenship,’ Both the construction of welfare recipient as well as the policy making process contributes to the disempowerment of those who are receiving support (as I will discuss in chapter 2.5),

Ideal of inclusion and “active” participation in the society is discursively still present, maybe even more than before. The emphasis is on “active” labour market inclusion, as both road and precondition to social inclusion. Little attention is given to the inequalities of the market to which people have to be “integrated” and their effects. (Lister 1998) Or, as Kildal notes, welfare policy is “less concerned with mutual recognition than with mutual obligations, less concerned with justice than with personal morality’ (2001: 15-16). Inclusion is no longer understood in a sense of equal status and recognition, discussed in the previous chapter on social citizenship.

2.3.2 Individualisation of responsibility – duty to activate, necessity to show the way

Above-described reading of the situation of the poor excludes structural factors, such as unequal impact of increasingly globalised and deregulated labour market (see chapter 2.4), on the situation of the poor, low-income households. Poverty is associated with individual irresponsibility/failure to manage risks. Individual – possibly further corrupted by overgenerous welfare - is held responsible for his or her adverse economic situation, for the inability to cover living costs or find stable employment. There is shift in the state's obligation to provide jobs to an individual's obligation to seek employment actively, while the primacy of full-time job and job-based (insurance-based) contribution still remains one of the important criteria for adequate welfare support.

Emphasis on individual responsibility, endeavour and capacitates obscures structural conditions as well as the state's failure to provide protection or meet individual needs (MacLeavy 2016). Many authors emphasise that neoliberalism leads to a shift in emphasis from universal (status/right based) entitlement to conditional contract. Yet, in most countries, welfare had never been unconditional (Eping-Andersen 1991). What changes in the above-described process is the balance between rights and duties. The strong emphasis on conditionality and *contractual character of welfare*, particularly social protection directed to the unemployed and low-income people, becomes *problematic in the context of individualisation of responsibility and exclusion of structural factors* - as it creates conditions and demand which cannot be fulfilled by individual[10].

The emphasis on individual responsibility goes hand in hand with promotion of a stronger and more *moralistic work ethic*. Work is no longer only one component of welfare; it becomes central to the ways welfare is constructed and to the way we speak about it. Gidden's (1998) "no rights without responsibilities" motto goes hand in hand with performative appeals to work: "Work is not just about earning a living! It is a way of life" (British Labour Party MP[11]). Work assumes a form of moral obligation. While there is a

[10] The process of individualisation had been parallel by attempts to transfer great responsibility to local and nongovernment actors, under the idealised image of bottom-up governance and "civic society" (Parsell et all 2022). While this is a multidimensional process, it also confirmed the withdrawal of the state responsibility to address structural causes.

[11] H. Harman, speech on government priority for tackling social exclusion, November 1997, in Lister 1998: 219.

considerable push to accept employment (independently of its quality), what is being enforced is a wider duty "to activate", accept and perform responsibility (Raffass 2017, Wright 2016).

Consequently, in line with approaching welfare as a (road to) moral deficiency, the welfare programs often aim to change attitudes, behaviour, and self-image of welfare claimants. (Greer 2016). Once welfare recipients are seen as corrupted (or in danger of being corrupted) by the lack of work, the duties imposed upon them can legitimately expand beyond the realm of the labour market to individual behaviour: whether it is to seek employment, undertake training, send children to school, or attend health clinics (Dean 2007). Such framing also legitimises imposition of strict rules and financial penalties for minor non-compliance, such as late arrivals or missed appointments (Greer 2016).

As benefit recipient are perceived as *lacking proper agency and moral guidance*, increased attention must be given to identifying potential misuses. This is not present only in the visible, sometimes performative, controlling measures targeted towards welfare recipients (which will be briefly discussed in the following part). It impacts overall logic of the system of social protection. Even in policies aiming at greater protection, identification of "social benefits trap" become one of the main concerns, particularly for the construction of social protection for unemployed and low-income households. Policies must lead recipients to proper behaviour, so increased attention is given to behavioural economics ("the nudge") with the aim to motivate and push people in the economically and morally proper behaviour (Dwyer, Wrights 2014). In my experience (as I further analyse in the article Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households, part 3.2 of this theses), while such approaches might indeed identify weak point of social systems, the presumptions of these policies are often distant from real live experience and motivation of many low-income households (see also Morgen, Makovsky 2003 or Laruffa 2022 for similar critique).

Yet, a more important implication is that all these approaches deprive low-income and unemployed people of a legitimate (moral) agency and expertise. Lack of activity and responsibility implies that change needs to come from the outside (in this sense it echoes Lewis's concept of the "culture of poverty"). Consequently, it is legitimate to construct social policies in an expert top-down, paternalistic manner. Those in position power become experts on everyday lives of the poor, while "expertise borne of experience" (Lister 2007) has little legitimacy.

2.3.3 Conditionality as a path to re-commodification

So, under neoliberalism, policies targeted to the poor are primarily focused on encouraging and facilitating labour market involvement (and promotion of behaviour that is supposed to enable it). The emphasis lies in both positive and negative incentive reinforcement and employment assistance - whereas job creation declines (Bonoli 2010).

The construction of welfare moves away from a model in which the state counters the market by providing protection and strengthening position of the citizens. Social policies are approaching a model where the state serves the market, particularly its demands for flexibility and labour cost reduction, which is often treated as necessary precondition of success in globalised labour market (MacLeavy 2016). This is often described as a shift toward recommodification of labour, referring to the *intensification of labour market discipline* and subordination of social policies to the needs of employers, increasing thus the vulnerability of the (potential) workers (Greer 2016, Raffass 2017, MacLeavy 2016).

The most visible example are "workfare" policies, "programmes and schemes that require people to work in return for social benefits" (Lodemel, Trickey 2001: 6), mostly implemented in the US, UK, and other liberal countries since 1980s, and often targeted to social assistance programs (i.e. to the poorest strata of the population). Often going hand in hand with labour market deregulation, it emphasises a job search (over a training), intensifying control and surveillance over the unemployed, often pushing them to either accept low-quality jobs or withdraw from the social support system. Such approaches are often used as a prime example of the changing shift of balance between rights and duties under neoliberalism (Lodemel, Trickey 2001).

The testing and control also increased the importance of discretionary practices of officers responsible for the administration of the benefits. Race, ethnicity, class or gender shape the approaches of benefits administrators. These processes are further amplified by privatisation of social service provision in some countries and modes of evaluation of their effectivity, which often measures success primary through labour market re-entry (exit from social systems), leaving little space to deal with the complex realities of the poor, particularly the most vulnerable (Borghi, van Berkel 2007, Watkins-Hayes 2009, Dubois 2016).

However, it is important to note, that the critique of the demoralising effect of the welfare state as social consumption did not lead directly to retrenchment of welfare directed towards unemployed and low-income households, nor to the expansion of penal mechanism, but

rather to gradual re-structuralisation. Yet, despite considerable differences between states, by the 2010s, welfare support was more targeted and conditional upon individual ability to prove a willingness to work in most European countries, across welfare state regimes (Clasen a Clegg 2007, Kersbergen a Hemerijck 2012). The trend has been supported by promotion of "activation" policies by international organisation, such as OECD, and by the European Union and also by increased deregulation of the labour market and austerity policies introduced after 2008 economic crisis (Lodemel and Gubrium 2014, Taylor-Gooby, Gumy, Otto 2015).

As had been showed by Raffass (2017) in her overview of the existing evaluation of active labour market policies (job search assistance and monitoring, subsidized employment, trainings, subsidized public sector placements), such policies might yield relatively favourable results in the short-run, such as reducing the time in registered unemployment. However, except for substantive vocational training, they are scarcely pathways to stable jobs, and - based on data from different EU countries - neither seem to limit the overall number of benefit recipients. As she sums, through activation: "unemployed individuals are driven into low-skill, low-pay jobs, in which they continue to stay partly dependent (through in-work benefits). Such jobs are also unstable, making repeated returns to unemployment highly probable" (Raffass 2017: 354).

By 2014 support with minimum income schemes (social assistance) had been in all European states conditional upon participation on work-related activities, with visible shift away from human resource development approach to primacy of early transition to work. When Lodemel and Gubrium (2014) evaluated these policies, their evaluation ended with open question, whether social polices targeted towards the poorest in the society, are returning to the principles of poor laws.

2.3.4 Management of extreme poverty and privatisation of the social protection of middle class

Neoliberalism treats inequality not only as acceptable but also an important condition of growth, so it is no longer perceived as one of the core concerns of social policies. This is combined with above-discussed shift in the understanding of the effects of social protection (and particularly welfare targeted to the poor, low-income households) as promoting potentially socially undesirable behaviour and with the emphasis on austerity, returns of

social expenditures. All these factors contribute to shift in the focus of social policies to the "management of extreme poverty" (Kourachanis 2020). Poverty, material deprivation and unemployment moved to the centre of attention not only of policy makers, but also researches as the main social problems.

The concerned with problem of "worst off", poorest, marginalized groups (I will further discuss some of the implication in the chapter 2.6) is easily legitimized when social cohesion and inclusion in not approached from the perspective of full participation in the society, but labour market participation. The policy often takes a form of minimalist safety net characterised by above-described conditionality, workfare/primacy of labour market involvement (Kourachanis 2020). Constructed with a notion of "a trampoline' (Fleckenstein 2012), only to let its recipients, as will be discusses in next chapter, to circle in precarious jobs.

This erosion of the system of protection of low-income household is paralleled by financialisation of social protection, a process when *private financial and insurance-based-product products replace welfare protection* for larger proportion of the society. Particularly - but not only - in the Anglo-Saxon countries financial products are replacing protection in the areas traditionally guaranteed by the state. Dealing with various life events such as education, retirement, and health care or housing (mortgages, private pension funds), they became a (seemingly) natural part of one's life in (Kear, 2013, Soederberg, 2014). This process does accelerate the logic of individualisation of responsibility, emphasises not only virtues of individual responsibility and self-reliance, but also entrepreneurship, creating *a new ideal of work-saver-investor subject* (Berry 2015).

Increased reliance on financial products, often supported and subsidized by state, also brings a shift to the power relations in access to social protection. The reliance on financial, privately provided product increases power of private actor over individuals and households. Privately provisioned social security schemes are primarily led by the logic and discipline of the market, consequently subjecting individuals, and households to this logic (Kear, 2013, Soederberg, 2014), accelerating the process of recommodification, declining protective role of states in the social area[12]. This increases vulnerability of the poorest, who are trapped between minimalist state-provided system of social protection and often predatory

[12] Turner (2016) even proposes the term denizen to emphasise weaking access to citizenship rights and protection.

mechanism of financial products providers, which is legitimized by their lack of stable income (Soederberg, 2014).

However, the private financial system enables self-protection for assets owners (including many homeowners), who are thus becoming less reliant on welfare protection (Berry 2015). According to some authors, such as Mau (2015), these process shape diminished interest in welfare. Members of middle class are increasingly (persuaded that they are) able to meet its needs through private resources, which contributes to the demand for reduced welfare spending and tax refusal, undermining the alliance between the working and middle class.

2.4 Combined Effects of Precarity and Welfare Restructuring – Amplifying the Process of Precarisation and Social Segmentation

The changes in the construction of welfare were paralleled by structural changes in the labour market. The process of globalisation, financialisation, de-unionisation and the digital revolution in the past decade has led to the ongoing erosion of the Fordist employment regime for a growing proportion of the workforce (Kalleberg, Vallas 2017). One of the core outcomes of these developments is the rise of precarious work and the perception of precarity and (economic) insecurity in a more general sense which impacts large groups of the population. Despite impacting all strata of the market, it had an unequal impact on the population, increasing the economic precariousness of some groups that are often trapped between low-wage, unstable forms of employment and prolonged periods of unemployment.

I will start this chapter with a brief summary of the impact of these processes on the position of low-income households on the labour market and character of their employment. However, the main focus of this chapter is on the interaction between of increased precarity and construction of welfare protection. I examine the effects of combined "force" of the changes on the labour market on the position of low-income households and neoliberal restructuralization of the welfare targeted to these groups.

In the last part of this chapter, I look on so-called "social inclusion" policies. It had been a bit of a puzzle for me, how to include social inclusion, as it often stands apart in the analysis of welfare state, not really fitting into the constructions which primarily follows changes in social benefit systems and character of employment. I had decided to include it in this chapter (and not the previous) as it reacts to visible marginalisation of some groups, which is closely related to the labour market precarisation. However, I discuss it here primarily because I hope to show that it is also an approach which contributes to the gap between the narrowed-down understanding of the social protection policies and experience of insecurity, which impacts large strata of the population.

2.4.1 Precarisation

Precarious work was most famously defined by Vosko "as work for remuneration characterised by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements" (Vosko 2010: 2). Similarly, Kalleberg (2009) characterise precarious employment by (a lack of) security over the continuity of employment (lack of contract, temporal contracts), limited social protection rights (access to health insurance, social security), low or uncertain level of pay, uncertain, long or short and/or anti-social hours working hours, lack of workers representation (collective bargaining) etc. Other authors emphasise the impact of precarious employment in other areas of life. Barbier, Brygoo and Viguier (2002) describe precarious work as a situation when a person's economic productivity becomes an overwhelming priority.

Most statistical data confirm a rising level of less stable forms of employment in Western Europe and North America. However, it is important to note that stable (rather than precarious) employment represents a historical exception. The secure forms of employment had often been limited to specific groups of "insider" employees, particularly white men in European and North American countries. Others, such as women, ethnic minorities and migrants, often did not have access to permanent employment (Kalleberg and Vallas 2017). From this point of view, the current increased sensibility to the processes of precarisation reflects a rising level of precarity among once privileged groups. In a slightly ironical manner, some authors speak of "democratisation of insecurity" which now impacts all strata of the labour market (Kalleberg, Vallas 2017).

I consider it important to explore broader political and economic shifts related to increased precarity. The increasingly precarious character of work limit's ability to manoeuvre due to economic constrains. A worker trapped between series of low wage, insecure jobs has a limited negotiating position, due to an absence of alternative, concerns over day-to-day economic survival. He or she cannot withdraw from the precarious labour market, yet often feels easily replaceable. Precarity limits the ability to act. It increases the dependence and control over those working in these positions, rendering them more exposed to the vagaries of capital (Alberti at al 2018, Standing 2014). Further, with ongoing retrenchment of social protection, the increased insecurity is often not limited to the area of labour market but experienced in other areas of life (such as housing). It is important that the feelings of insecurity and vulnerability often goes beyond concern over economic survival, and that this experience is not limited to the most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, whereas the employment relations are becoming even less protective for all, the ability of workers to attain formal, high-quality "standard" employment is still strongly differentiated. The negative impact of a rising level of labour market insecurities is most substantial between marginalised and vulnerable groups. De-unionisation and the rise of temporary and agency employment are more pronounced in the sectors and in the positions with a predominance of migrant, (ethnic) minorities or women or low-skilled workers (Castles 2015). Those who find themselves in the marginalised position also dispose of limited tools to coop with the insecurity and income instability (Pugh 2015). This contributes to the self-perpetuating character of precarity and increased levels of inequality (Atkinson 2015).

In countries with a strongly liberalised labour market (such as the USA or UK), the precarity impact majority of the workers. Shildrick et al. (2012), in their book based on in-depth interviews in UK post-industrial region, uses the term „low-pay, no-pay cycle" to describe the long-term experience o insecure, low-wage jobs. In the word of precarious workers, the borders between working poor and "welfare dependent" become increasingly blurred. In-work and recurrent poverty is becoming as important an issue as unemployment (Crettaz, 2013; Shildrick et al., 2012).

In countries of European continental and (to some point) southern welfare states, these processes contribute to a rising labour market segmentation (Häusermann and Schwander 2012, Palier, Thelen 2010). These are countries with traditionally stronger protections of "core" workers (often those linked to a male breadwinner 'norm'), with a stronger representation through unions and political parties. Despite the push towards labour market liberalisation, the status and privileges of these groups of workers remained relatively well protected. However, the push towards greater flexibility and cost reduction also leads to a growing number of workers in "atypical" or "nonstandard" employment relationships. We can observe a distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders", i.e. those who have access to stable full-time, often unionised employment and those whose access to these types of jobs is limited. (Palier, Thelen 2010, Emmenegger et al., 2012, Rueda 2005). Despite considerable sectoral variance in precarious work, the push towards greater flexibility and cost-efficiency impacts all segments of the labour market. Labour market segmentation, atypical, low-wage forms of employment, thus can be found in the sectors that used to be characterised by stable forms of employment. These positions are often taken by people in marginalised labour market positions (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Rueda, 2005, Palier and Thelen 2010).

2.4.2 Minimalization and/or dualization of welfare

Despite many difference the post-war welfare states were constructed around the idea of full employment and stable full time employment relations (and strong union representation in some countries). In the context of increased precarity the principle of contribution/insurance and stable workplace-based protection become increasingly exclusionary.

This divide between those with access to full-time stable jobs and people cycling between various forms of precarious employment is consequently translated into dualisation of the social protection schemes. This process is more pronounced in some countries, particularly in continental European welfare states (Palier 2010, Taylor-Goby, Gumy, Otto 2015, Hemerijck, Eichhorst 2010). Southern Europe has experienced a push toward labour market liberalisation after the 2008 economic crisis[13]. The "insiders" maintain access to traditional, insurance-based unemployment protection based on previous contributions. In contrast, those working in precarious or atypical forms of employment are becoming more dependent on the minimum income schemes since they do not fulfill the unemployment insurance/occupational protection scheme requirement (Emmenegger et al. 2012). The experience of second-class labour and social protection is thus limited to the "outsiders", amplifying thus social divisions.

With increased flexibilization of labour market relations, for many workers the minimum income schemes are no longer a temporary protection of last resort but turns into a "mass program" (Bahle Pfeifer Wendt 2010). Palier (2010) describes this shift as "*a new world of welfare for 'atypical' workers*", which relies predominantly on tax-financed non-contributory benefits. As had been discussed earlier, these of minimalist safety net characterised by increased conditionality, control of the workers and push towards rapid labour market involvement. The primacy of labour marketer involvement in these programmes (particularly workfarist policies) might be successful in decreasing number of welfare recipient, in "pushing" the unemployed off benefits (Raffass 2017). However, there is increased evidence that they fail to achieve combat long-term unemployment or reducing poverty. Decades of the predominance of neoliberal framing have also brought increased evidence, that these policies

[13] According to Prosser (2016), debt-related external pressure of supernational organisations had "unleashed pressures for precarious work", impacting all strata of the labour market.

often contribute to the process of precarisation. Multiple authors had shown that primal concern of labour market inclusion inherent in tax-financed non-contributory support (minimum income schemes) contribute to *replication of the unstable labour market position of low-income working people and make low-paid or precarious jobs socially acceptable,* pressuring its acceptance from a position of state authority (Umney et al. 2017, MacLeavy 2016, Soss, Fording, Schram 2011, Raffass 2017). There is growing evidence of the negative impact of pressure, particularly sanction and coercion, on other areas of life, such as mental health of the benefit recipients (Raffass 2017).

Perceived inevitability of precarisation as a character of current global economy led many policy makers to search for ways to loosen its negative impact. The language of "new social risk" *attempts to reconcile labour market flexibility (including weak statutory employment protection) with strong social rights and protection***.** A prime example are the Danish and Dutch "flexicurity" programmes promoted by the European Commission, which aimed to compensate the diminishing worker protection by increasing spending on worker security and supporting worker transitions between jobs (Greer 2016). However, the experience of the 2008 economic crisis had shown the fragility of this concept, which in many countries resulted in a move towards greater flexibility without adequate "security" (Lopez, Court, Canalda 2014, Hermann 2014). Other countries, such as the UK, attempted to normalise precarious work by raising in-work benefits. However, these were the first to be cut when the economic crisis came.

2.4.3 New emphasis on social inclusion

The above-described processes are accompanied by an increased attention to "social inclusion", a concept which originates from France, where it gained prominence during the 1980s and 1990s in reaction to increased awareness of the problem of long-term unemployment, racism, and discrimination, disproportionally impacting deprived, ethnically diverse suburbs (Beland 2007). By the 2000s, the idea of social inclusion became one of the central concepts of EU policies on the EU level, impacting measures targeted toward its member states (Mareš, Sirovátka 2008), as well as an understanding of poverty as a social problem (Madanipour, Shucksmith, Talbot 2015).

Some authors linked this to rising sensitivity, both on the international and the EU level, to the negative impacts of increased inequality and processes of social exclusion and

marginalisation in the late 1990s to early 2000s (Hemerjick, 2012; Mahon, 2014, Kourachanis 2020). EU policies of the beginning of the 21st century aimed to find a compromise between the protective role of welfare and neoliberal emphasis on economic growth and narrowly defined efficiency of public spending, legitimizing public speeding that enabled labour market inclusion (i.e. increasing individual skills and competences, ability to self-manage risks)[14].

The concept of social inclusion offered a tool to address multiple layers that shape the unequal position of some people, particularly members of ethnic minorities, and the process that shapes them (Mareš, Sirovátka 2008). They also react to increased sensitivity to racial and ethnic cleavages, their visibility and mobilisation around these issues in public space (Ellison 2000, Fraser 2020) and acknowledgement of the problem of discrimination or spatial segregation. While the class paid central role in the struggle over citizenship since 19th century, by the end of 20th century the struggles over "cultural" aspect attracted much stronger attention (Turner 1997). In this sense, social inclusion legitimised the importance of social and cultural dimensions for the participation in the society. It also reintroduced the question of participation which goes beyond labour market inclusion into the social policy debates, as well as the question of quality of life and its precondition and measurement (Pantazis, Gordon, Levits 2006, Madanipour, Shucksmith, Talbot 2015).

However, while it is a concept which allows addressing multifaced and processual aspects of poverty, the emphasis is more on the consequence, it is more a descriptive and reactive concept, through which structural causes of (racialized, spatial) inequality are scarcely addressed. In this sense, social inclusion is more concerned with calming the most visible tension, while maintaining status quo (Laruffa 2022). Further, despite multiplicity of dimension, which it allows to cover, in the policy reality (both on national and EU level) it often replicates emphasis on individualised "active" inclusion through employment, fitting

[14] These approaches are sometimes described by the term "social investment" (Nolan 2013). Social investment emerged as an idea (particularly on the left) aiming to re-legitimise the welfare state in the face of the critique of social consumption policies, promising an alternative retrenchment in social spending, an equilibrium between social protection and pressure on the labour market participation. In these approaches, the need to address problems of increased inequality and social tensions, (re) legitimises state intervention and spending, yet this emphasis is still primarily on labour market inclusion. The continuity of the neoliberal emphasis on labour market participation and efficiency led to the promotion of policy designs that maximise the returns of social expenditures, mainly through the support of active employment and social participation (Jenson, 2012).

into above-described moral narrative of inclusionary power work (Beland 2007, Madanipour, Shucksmith, Talbot 2015).

In the context of neoliberal social policies implementation contributes to narrowing down the focus of social protection systems, legitimising modest targeted social programmes only to (small groups of) those who are "socially excluded". Further, targeted focus on social inclusion (or "socially excluded¨ people) also opens road to racialisation of poverty. Since its very beginning, social inclusion policies brought a more or less hidden focus on groups with allegedly different cultural background (ethnic minorities, people with migration background), often spatially concentrated. Social inclusion is used and measures a seemingly apolitical, culturally neutral term. However, the connection to spatial concentrated, culturally different population remains present in the imaginations. Social inclusion discourse thus adds to the predominant emphasis individual responsibility a layer which allow for explanation beyond individual without addressing the structural causes.

Within social inclusion framing, the important distinction is between those who are "in" or "out", included or excluded from society (Beland 2007). Consequently, the *society appears as a non-problematic unit whereas the socially excluded poor are seen as 'outsiders' and 'problematic groups'* (Kronauer in Hurrle et al. 2014). "In"/"out" distinctions also rendered less visible, and thus legitimate, income or class-related difference ("up"-" down") (Beland 2007).

2.5 Poor/Welfare Recipient as a Failed Citizen of Neoliberalism

If we look on the process described in the chapter, what effects do they have on the social citizenship? As I have discussed, the neoliberal shift towards individual responsibility and market-based solutions led to invisibilisation of structural factors and the stigmatisation of unemployment and low or precarious income as individual failure. Benefits, as potentially corrupting the poor, need to come with strict work requirements and the behaviour of the poor requires regulation, the state must assume responsibility for assisting and monitoring the needy. When welfare right should be limited to those who meet both formal and informal rules of membership (Dwyer 2002), systems of social protection that embrace this logic often contribute to replication of the precarious status of the poor.

But what position, voice these people have? In this chapter, I will examine how previously described changes in the construction of welfare and understanding of the situation of poor shape position of people with low, precarious income, those experiencing poverty, unemployment, who have to rely on social benefits to cover their basic need. In doing so, I return to the initial conceptualisation of citizenship. Thus, my concern is primarily with the perceptions and recognition of the status of these people, and their own perception of their position in the society.

2.5.1 Poor as failed, second-class citizen

In the neoliberal debate about welfare, there is strong distinctions between deserving and undeserving poor. Again, this distinction is of much older data, and inherent in all systems of social protection – however, it becomes more prominent, central to the neoliberal approaches to welfare. As Murray described in his writings on "Underclass": "there were another set of poor people… didn't lack just money. They were defined by their behaviour. Their homes were littered and unkept. The men in the family were unable to hold a job for more than a week in the time. Drunkenness was common. The children grow up ill-schooled and ill-behaved and contributed a disproportional share of the local juvenile delinquents" (Murray 2005: 138, originally published in 1990).

As I have described in chapter 2.3 with the predominance of neoliberal framing, the problem of unemployment or low wages is approached as an individual problem, and structural

contexts are overlooked. Once we exclude structural causes and individualise the responsibility, unemployment and low wages can be easily treated solely as an outcome of individual deficiency or failure.

Neoliberal citizen is active, self-disciplined, participates in wage work, manages risk prudently, makes reasonable choices (Soss, Fording, Schram 2011, Woolford, Nelund 2013, Berry 2015). To sustain oneself becomes a civic responsibility, in which the poor, unemployed or low-income households had failed (MacLeavy 2016). In the social polices influenced by neoliberalism, the figure of unemployed or underemployed poor is often in the centre of attention, because it represents the opposite pole. Unemployed or underemployed poor it the "Other" of neoliberal social policies, in opposition to whom person can construct his or her status as good, deserving citizen. Consequently, it is also the "Other" against whom Anderson's tolerated citizen (people that struggle to be seen as contributing to society well-being) construct their or value, deservingness.

The construction of unemployed or underemployed poor as the Other reflects the preoccupation with moral value ascribed to the work under neoliberalism. However, the distinction between "contributing working" and "welfare dependent" (non-working poor) is difficult to maintain in reality of low-income households where these borders are obscure due to precarious character of accessible jobs. The borders between deserving workers and underserving unemployed benefit recipients are also blurred due to increased stigmatisation of benefits and conditionality (Dwyer and Wright 2014). In this sense, in the reality of neoliberal welfare, the failure is not only lack of work, but inadequate income, making in it increasingly difficult to prove one's deservingness.

"Sub-citizen", "second (or third) class citizens", "conditional citizens", "undeserving citizen", are between the terms used by different authors to describe the experience and position of poor, low-income, unemployed and precarious welfare recipients (Roche 2002, Powell 2002, Morgen and Makovsky 2003, Edmiston, Humpage 2017, Seeman 202). The perception of these people as undeserving, second- or third-class citizens is not related only to their measurable contribution but to the assumption that they are not behaving as proper members on the "community", that they are breaking the "rules of membership". A threat not only to self, but society as whole, disrupting its values and norms.

As unemployment and low wages are treated as an individual failure, the support the people are claiming or receiving can be treated as a gift, supporting thus their unequal status,

creating an impression of moral obligations (Graeber 2011, Kourachanis 2020). This further legitimises the right of the society to demand something in return, providing legitimisation for neoliberal emphasis on the enforcement of "responsibilities". These interventions have important implications not only on individual or group quality of life or work, but also send a strong message about his or her position in the society.

2.5.2 Stigmatisation of welfare and internalisation of categories of deservingness

Multiple researchers have shown that *increased conditionality contributes to the stigmatization of welfare*. Kumlin and Rothstein (2005) show that the imposition of narrow eligibility requirements often stigmatize recipient and contributes to the imagination that they are involved in fraudulent activities. Contrary to universal ones, means-tested programs create an impression that those that are supported do not deserve such support, producing social distinctions and undermining generalized social trust and perception of fairness of the system in the process (Rothstein 2001). The more targeted the benefits are, the more stigmatizing it is to receive them, decreasing empathy toward the least well-off. It is symptomatic that the most extensive discussions about "dependency culture" occur in liberal regimes, which provide the least generous support (Larsen 2008).

Research by John Hills (in Jensen and Tyler 2015) show that the support for welfare cut is constructed around the perception that it goes to a minority population of "economically inactive" people. For Hills, this "welfare myth" contributes to social polarisation between "them" ("parasitical benefit dependent others") and "us" (working people). Particularly, it hardens the public attitudes towards working-age benefits recipients. Similarly, Taylor-Gooby (in Jensen and Tyler 2015) speaks about "escalating benefit stigma" and "the growing stigmatisation of poverty among people of working age". Jensen and Tyler (2015) use these findings to explain the persistent support for benefit cuts in the UK even during the (2008) economic recession. Through this "political economy of disgust", a wide *range of popular discontents with the welfare state is projected upon the undeserving benefit recipient*. The imagination of deserving "hardworking" families thus becomes a central component of anti-welfare policies, strengthening the classificatory distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" citizens, independently of the reality of precarious, disrupted work trajectories of many low-income households.

Contrary to the neoliberal image of "dependency culture", multiple analyses from countries with extensive neoliberal reforms of both labour market and welfare, have shown that welfare claimants usually do not celebrate the right to welfare but regard it as a last resort and state of an adversary **(**Dean 2007, Shildrick et al. 2012). Based on research conducted in Canada, Woolford and Nelund (2013) show how the benefit recipients struggle to present themselves as "active, prudent, autonomous, responsible, and entrepreneurial" to show that they deserve support. We had repeatedly encountered similar *feelings of inferiority and struggles to prove one's respectability* in the research in the Czech context (Trlifajová at al 2015, Wladyniak, Trlifajová, Kudrnáčová, 2019, Gajdoš, Trlifajová 2020).

As shown in the UK and New Zealand context by Edmiston (2017), affluent citizens perceive they have a legitimate claim to the status and rights of social citizenship. More deprived (unemployed, low-income) people feel that their income and employment status undermines their standing in society, right to participate and feeling self-worth. According to his findings, the *experience of claiming welfare support undermines a sense of common belonging and citizenship*. Soss's work (1999) describes a similar experience of the recipients in the American AFDC/TANF system: being treated as undeserving, that their claim to government benefits is shameful[15].

2.5.3 Experience of controlling welfare undermining citizenship claims

Wright (2016) examines how "activation", particularly in its mandatory, disciplinatory face can, in its effect, lead to disempowerment - compared to approaches of voluntary user-designed services, where people feel treated with respect and dignity. Based on research in Canada and USA, Rudman and Aldrich (2016) described the contradictions in the experience of welfare recipients, who are being "activated ", but feel then whatever they do, they are "stuck" in the situation of long-term unemployment. Such experience strengthens the feeling of isolation and depression, fears regarding the future, and struggles to maintain a positive self and social identity.

The process of disciplination toward (performative) labour market inclusion through the condition placed upon welfare recipients is accompanied by a simultaneous process of self-

[15] His findings emphasise that the perceived arbitrary of the decision-making process increases distrust in the welfare system, and by extension, in the federal government.

disciplination of those who are subjected to these measures. Woolfor and Nelund (2013) show *welfare recipient try to present themselves as "good neoliberal citizens"* – entrepreneurial, active in searching job, prudent in risk management. MacLeavy (2016), refering Fraser (2003) and Hartman (2005) speaks about the creation of "docile bodies" who discipline themselves in the name of individualised responsibility. These analyses show that many benefit recipients construct their sense of dignity and respect within the (internalised) neoliberal categories of deservingness and legitimacy. However, this implies a limited possibility of collective struggle in case of experience of injustice of unfairness (which is not uncommon). Injustice of unfairness or impossibility to fulfil the rules (described by most of above-described authors[16]) is thus often resolved individually. Such individual "subversive strategies" and often take form of passive resistance or justification of small-scale benefit frauds, which are sometimes necessary to ensure basic needs or survival (Edminston and Humpage 2017).

This of course does not imply other forms of mobilisation and involvement in political struggles. When Ellison discusses in 2000 that citizens have to increasingly defend themselves against erosion of the social rights, she emphasises new forms and varieties of citizen engagements, which are no longer based on "permanent solidarities" of class. In his observation, citizen actions are not only more fragmented and temporal, but also based on variety of cross-cutting social divisions, discourses, and ideologies. Class becomes just one form of belonging along with race, gender, ethnicity or place "or so on" around which claims and mobilisation can be formed. Predominance of struggle over cultural recognition (mobilisation of groups in struggle over of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality) might contribute to lowers interests in socio-economic redistribution as a remedy for injustice (Fraser 2020).

However, in their 2003 article Morgen and Makovsky claimed that *individualising discourse of welfare limits the possibilities of collective action by the poor* and that apolitical self-help survival strategies prevail. The above-described findings seem to confirm this process. The

[16] While the prevailing public narrative does not provide much opportunity for reframing the situation of those with insufficient means, some authors show that the narrative changes in times. Using data from the interviews with benefit recipients in two different points of time (2008 and 2013), Edmiston, and Humpage (2018) observed a decline in support for welfare conditionality over time: diminishing importance ascribed to financial independence, internalisation "responsibility" and the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" beneficiaries.

research above shows that in countries with predominance of neoliberal framing[17] the collective experience of welfare marginalisation does more often lead to alienation and feeling loss of dignity of these people, internalisation of their own undeservingness, unequal position. The need to distance oneself from the stigma of welfare does not support claims making.

[17] Larger scale comparison is beyond scale of this thesis. However, it seems that the opposition to stigmatising and punitive provision had been stronger and politically more successful in countries where a neoliberal approach had not been so widely embraced, such as France (Belland 2007, Barbier, Fargion 2004).

2.6 Ethnic Poverty as a Public Threat

I have discussed in previous chapters how changes in welfare impacted by neoliberalism contribute to the process of precarisation, impacting mostly those who already find themselves in the marginal position on the labour market. These developments have a strong racial and gender dimension – women and people of colour, migrants are unequally more impacted. While gender inequalities remain less visible, the unequal impact of labour marker insecurities and neoliberal welfare state restructuring (along with other factors, such as unequal access to housing market, discrimination, etc.) amplified the visibility of the poor people of colour or with migrant or ethnic background.

The history of western states has been marked by mechanisms of control of "others", imposing particular measures on the behaviour and spatial patterns of those perceived as treating or disruptive for the society (Sibley 1995, Anderson 2013). Most states of the European-North American area still perceive themselves as predominantly and culturally "white". People of colour, people with migrant or ethnic background are often labelled as minorities and perceived as outsiders, irrelevantly of their actual legal status. In this chapter, I will focus on the way in which restructuring of welfare and image of its recipients intertwined with the perceptions of racial or ethnic minorities. From the perspective of citizenship, I am trying to understand how neoliberal approach to welfare may reinforce (or disrupt) the racial and ethnic hierarchies in a society.

In the following pages I relay a bit more on the literature from the US context and from Central and Eastern European countries. These are countries with large ethnic/racial minorities, which have full citizenship right for generations, yet still are in many aspects not treated as equal (black American, Roma). I believe that the situation is slightly different from the countries where the ethnic/racialized "Others" are perceived as migrants (outsiders in legal terms of citizenship). While "welfare chauvinism" with minorities perceived as migrants[18], aims more often to exclude, the "welfare racism"[19] does not have that option and

[18] However, many people who are living in western European countries, such as France, might have lived there for generation. Similarly, most of the Czech Roma came to country after second world war as labour migrants from (current) Slovakia. The distinction in the text refers more to categories and concerns in public spaces. Roma in Czech public space (similar to "black" in the USA) do not have a "country of origin", where they could be sent.

searches for possibilities of control. However, as I will show in this chapter, there are also many parallels, particularly in the culturalization of poverty and public distresses over its spatial concentration.

2.6.1 Visibility and call for management of ethnic poverty

For some authors, the racialised image of poor serves as explanation of increased support for welfare state retrenchment, increased conditionality of support and control of its recipient. In his influential book "Why Americans hate welfare" Gilens (1999), has shown that despite predominant stereotypes about the USA, public polls show an ongoing and strong public desire for more government effort and higher levels of spending for almost every aspect of the welfare state. However, according to his findings, attitudes towards concrete programs become increasingly influenced by the image of blacks as the main target group, undeserving of the support and misusing it. In his understanding, these beliefs and stereotypes contributed to the retrenchment of welfare support.

Yet, while public perception and image of welfare recipients are important aspects of the current situation, I believe we need to go beyond explanations that rely on racial antagonism as an explanation. Reflecting on anti-Roma racism, Powell and van Baar (2019) show how the racial stereotypes can be strengthened by neoliberalism. I have repeatedly discussed how neoliberalism obscures structural reasons of poverty. This is even more pronounced in the case of minorities: while social conditions and their historical origins are invisibilised, the outcomes – unemployment, spatial segregation, low quality housing, etc – are visible. Omission of structural causes and emphasis on individual moral responsibility renders the anti-Roma racism, which make these people particularly vulnerable to increased precarity, invisible. The Roma thus become *visible as those trespassing the rules, as criminals, not as people in vulnerable social and economic positions.* Using the case of Slovakia, van Baar shows how this consequently creates a right to act against them, because they had "who have violated rights and failed in their duties" (Powell, van Baar 2019:96).

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[19] Some authors (in Morgen and Makovsky 2003) proposed the term "welfare racism" to pint to the way the neoliberal changes in welfare in 1990s reinforced racial hierarchies, contributing to exclusion of poor families of colour form protection in the United States.

I also believe that the processes of racialisation of poverty had been amplified by *increased targeting of social policies*. As I will discuss further (chapter 3.3) in the Czech case, the attention on the problems of social inclusion confirmed the image of poverty as problem of culturally/ethnically different groups (Roma). Similarly, Seeman (2021) shows how Danish policies targeted the "ghetto", where the focus on welfare, educational and employment policies confirmed the understanding of inhabitants as those who are a threat to the "social cohesion" of the welfare state, in danger of misusing and destabilising the system.

When we overlook structural reasons and racism and see the situation of poor as an outcome of their individual choices, the *racialised poor are not only a failure but as a threat to the society,* as it seems that they do not share common values. The reaction is not only a call for retrenchment of the support – allegedly going to those who do not deserve it – but also a demand for the introduction of new complex policies, which would control behaviour of ethnic and migrant minorities. A call "to lock the trouble-making poor" (welfare recipients and criminals) "in a subordinate relation of dependence and obedience" (Wacquant 2009, Soss, Fording, Schram 2011).

Such demands have a strong emotional dimension and are embedded in an everyday lived experience of social endangerment. Fear, anxiety, sense of losing control or pride, which in the context of increased precarity impacts large groups of people, influence demand for increased, a search for confirmation of existing social statuses and hierarchies (Pratt 2007, Fassin 2013). Wacquant (2009) links the demand for contestations of the capacity of the state "as virile protectors of the society against its wayward members" with the retrenchment of the protective role of the states in many other areas of life (such as welfare and labour market protection).

2.6.2 Criminalisation and penal control of the poor

Luis Wacquant work on "American ghetto" might be the most famous analysis of impact of neoliberal welfare retrenchment, racialisation of increasingly visible and spatially concerted (black) poverty on the call of increased security measures targeted towards the racialized poor.

He follows the link between "mass incarceration" (impacting disproportionally young black male) and welfare state retrenchment, seeing them as a two-sided coin of social control of the poor: women are subject to the welfare side ("workfare"), men to the penal state

("prisonfare"). For him, both social and penal policies are part of the political project of neoliberal governance of poor, in which (welfare) state no longer protects them from the market but turns them into flexible workers on the low-wage labour market, in "subordinate relation of dependence and obedience" (Wacquant 2009:290).

For Wacquant, the criminalisation of the poor – i.e., criminalisation of outcomes of increased economic insecurity due to labour market deregulation and welfare retrenchment – is one of core mechanism of neoliberal governance. Policing and coercion become main tool of control of "troublemaking" racialized poor. Increased securitisation, targeted in the U. S. context particularly to segregated localities with hight proportion of black poor inhabitants, confirms the image of the (black) poor as criminals. Special measures are designed for - and deployed specifically in - declining lower-class districts in order to "check the social reverberations caused by the diffusion of social insecurity in the lower rungs of the class and ethnic hierarchy as well as assuage popular discontent over the dereliction of its traditional economic and social duties" (Wacquant 2010: 207). It seems not only legitimate, but necessary that retrenched welfare is replaced by expansion of penal state. According to Wacquant "*vilification and humiliation" of the criminalized black poor is not only acceptable, but can bring immense symbolic profit* (Wacquant 2010: 186).

Building on research in French banlieues, Fassin (2013) show how policies targeted to "troublemaking poor*"* can *legitimize non-respect of the rule of law within democratic regimes*. He focused on extensive, performative use of police force in reaction to minor conflicts which rather than criminal/violent behaviour reflected long-term experience of discrimination and inequality, social and racial tensions. He proposed the term petty[20] state of exception, to describe these reactions, which were characterized by "partial suspension of legal procedures and normal practices [that] affect certain populations, which are predominantly disadvantaged, marginalised and racialized. Democracy is still functioning but not everywhere and not for everyone." (Fassin 2014: 105).

For Fassin the introduction of a petty state of exception is an outcome of anxieties of population about its security. "In times of anxieties about security, both external and internal, societies tend to be tolerant regarding abuses that are viewed as the collateral damage of policies supposedly intended to protect them" (Fassin 2014: 116). Such non-respect of the

[20] By adding the adjective "petty" Fassin emphasises temporal, geographical and juridical limitation of these forms of disrespect of the law.

rule of law is limited to certain categories of population which are deemed as threatening. "The democratic illusion works because the majority is unaware or unwilling to be aware of the conditions imposed on minorities" (Fassin 2014: 105). While such policies often reflect (undeniable) anxieties, emotions and fears produced and experienced on local level, legitimacy of the replies is embedded in the national (and supranational) discourses and practices on which allow to frame stigmatised, racially discriminated, economically marginalised and politically excluded groups as criminals.

2.6.3 Welfare as a Tool of Racial Governance

Above mentioned authors focus on the expansion of punitive (penal) policies in reaction on diminished protective role of the welfare and their unequal and visible impact on minorities. Another stream of literature shows that the visibility and criminalisation of ethnic poverty also impacts the construction of welfare, emphasising the role of social policies as tool of governance of (racialized) poverty, imposition of social order. The understanding of the position and perception of the poor as public threat and consequent demand for greater control is in both perspectives similar.

Soss, Fording, Schram (2011) approach poverty governance as a way to secure cooperation and contribution of weakly integrated population and prevent disorder. His focus is on expansion of some aspects of social programs, targeted towards the poor, showing how they are used as a tool of disciplination. Emphasis is thus not only on coercive control. Neoliberal welfare is also seen as a governmentality project, which aims to change the perception and behaviour of the poor, turn them into "better citizens", who will "govern themselves" in better way (Soss, Fording, Schram 2011: 5). However, the need and form of this control is deeply embedded in the racialized image of the poor and their "culture". *Racialised image of the poor* is a *"powerful cognitive structure, guiding perception and choice in poverty governance*" (Soss, Fording, Schram 2011: 14).

Similarly, Seeman (2021) describes specific conditionality introduced in the past decade to the Danish systems of social protection, with the intention to enhance "social mixing", integration, appropriation of "Danish values". These measures had been introduced – mostly by right wing governments – in reaction to increased public sensibility to areas with larger proportion of inhabitants with Muslim / non-Western migrant background (labelled as "ghetto"). The portrait of these places as thereat to social cohesion legitimized introduction of

measures which restricted or made more conditional access to certain types of social protection. De iure based of the place or residence of the claimant (regardless to employment status), such conditionality de facto limits access on the basis of ascribed group (ethnic) identity[21]. Seeman speaks about "*culturalization of social citizenship*", which legitimises unequal access to social rights on the basis of perceived ethnic threat to the "community of value".

While Soss, Fording, Schram and Seemn emphasise the disciplinatory aspects of welfare, authors focusing on CEE countries and position of Roma show that social polices targeted towards poor can turn in a tool of *confirmation of existing social hierarchies.* The situation of Roma in CEE is in official documents often represented as one of "poverty and dependency" of citizens - a narrative that corresponds to the public perception of "dependency" and "misuse" of the welfare system by the Roma (Rat 2009, van Baar 2012).

Focusing on Slovakia activation policies, van Baar (2011) argues that the neoliberal dependency discourse[22] contributes to an imposition of an *ethnicity-based governmentality regime*, under which certain national programs targeting the poor or unemployed become a tool to control Roma citizens, under which Roma, albeit citizens, do not enjoy full rights. T. Thelen et al (2011) or Schwarcz (2012) focus on the implementation of welfare policies in Hungary and Romania, on the local level. They show how "national social citizenship rights are adapted by local state actors to local notions of belonging, manifesting the long-standing subordination of minority populations more blatantly than was the case under socialism." (Thelen at al., 2011: 524).

[21] As ethnicity played important role in the identification of "ghettos", it disproportionally effects citizens with migrant background.

[22] Workfare programs in post-communist countries are not the sole product of neoliberal reforms but are also built on the earlier principle of socialist inclusion through obligatory employment. However, the neoliberal reforms and related decentralization further amplified the role of local state actors in these processes van Baar (2011).

3 DEVELOPEMENT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

3.1 Neoliberalism and Czech System of Protection of Poor and Low-Income Households

While the welfare state in most European countries is an outcome of decades of debates and struggles, the current Czech social protection system for low-income households was created in a relatively brief period after 1989. Despite historical and institutional continuities with interwar period as well as "communist" Czechoslovakia, it is based more on a top-down policy approach rather than social struggle and public debates.

After the collapse of the socialist political and economic model, the newly elected democratic government had to cope with unemployment, a new phenomenon that formally hadn´t existed before. The main institutions of the current Czech welfare state were developed after 1989 through decisions of the central government, with limited involvement of the civil society. Drahokoupil (2009), referring to Bockman and Eyal, speaks of a new hybrid discourse of neoliberalism, shaped by Western (U.S.) centres of ideational production yet embedded in the local critique of state socialism. Employing anti-communist and anti-statism sentiments, it eventually became predominant, successfully framing any alternatives (favouring a more social-democratic outcome) as "pathologies of the old regime" (Drahokoupil 2009:91).

In the following pages, I will briefly describe development of the Czech system of social benefits targeted towards low-income households, with emphasis on the impact of neoliberal approaches in the decade after EU accession[23], focusing on the institutionalisation of the neoliberal approaches. Further, I will summarize existing data on the perception of the system and extend to which it is able to cover the situation of low-income households. This overview serves as a background for further examination of these processes in following chapters.

[23] The changes introduced to minimum income scheme since 2012 are discussed in detail in the article From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma in the chapter 3.3, as a part of analysis of racialisation of the Czech social benefit systems.

3.1.1 Social protection of poor and low-income households - toward increased conditionality

The Czech welfare system is sometimes described as fragmented, a mixture of neoliberalism, universalism and conservatism, which does not fit easily into any established models for the classification of the welfare state. However, there is a consensus that the policies dealing with unemployment and low income were first constructed as 'emergency measures' meant to moderate and compensate for the negative and presumably temporal consequence of the economic transition and preserve social cohesion (Offe 1993, Gallie et al., 2001; Potucek, 2004; Vanhuysse, 2006). The original proposition of social reform from the early 1990s promoted a more universalistic approach, representing certain continuity with the interwar period. However, this approach was soon replaced by neoliberal emphasis on limited role of the state and reduction of public expenses. Such policies were complimented by low-wage, low-unemployment labour market policies (Drahokoupil 2009). In the context of the dominant neoliberal discourse and the absence of strong labour unions and their political allies, the income protection policies gradually shifted closer to the residual and minimum safety net of liberal regimes[24] (Potůček, 2004; Inglot 2009, Saxonberg, Sirovátka 2009, Saxonberg et al. 2013). In the following paragraphs, I will summarize main changes which contribute to the institutionalisation of this logic in the Czech system of social protection of poor and low-income households.

Social benefits represent main, and most visible part of the Czech system of social protection of poor and low-income households. In 1995 the system of "state social support" (*státní sociální podpora*) was established. It introduced several means-tested benefits for low-income households: particularly child allowance (*přídavek na dítě*), which replaced universal child benefit, social contribution (*sociální příplatek*) for low-income families with children and housing support (*příspěvek na bydlení*), which hence on become the main tool of housing policy targeted towards low-income households (otherwise private house ownership supported state-subsidised mortgages had been promoted) and other smaller scale forms of support (commuting, childbirth, funerals, etc.).

[24] While some other areas/services, such as health care of education offer universal coverage (Linek Petrúšek 2020).

Despite offering support for low-income households, the system has been subjected to increased and retrenchment conditionality in the last two decades. It followed the logic of activation: In 2008, the financial threshold for child benefits had been decreased, and a part of the support shifted to in-work tax benefit (accessible only to workers with full-time employment/or income corresponding to full-time employment for minimum wage). Child benefits had not been valorised till 2017. This valorisation created a two tiers system, increasing the amount only for working households. Social reform of 2011/2012 brought limitation and consequent annulment of social contribution; a benefit targeted towards low-income households with children. The annulment led to an increase in the number of recipients of support within the more conditional, both mean- and income-tested minimum income scheme (Horáková et al., 2013, Průša et al., 2013). Changes in the past years followed similar logic – the year 2020, amid the COVID pandemic, brought an introduction of an amendment of housing support, aiming at controlling potential misuse, which led to a decrease of the recipients by 35thousands (Trlifajová, Chrudimská, 2021)

This system of social support had been paralleled[25] by the so-called "social assistance" (*pomoc v hmotné nouzi*), a minimum income scheme offering support to households unable to cover their basic needs. Social assistance is both mean and income tested benefit. The scheme had been originally regulated by two acts, which were in 2006, after more than a decade of preparation, replaced by Material Distress Assistance Act (*Zákon o pomoci v hmotné nouzi*, legislation came in force in 2007). The act fundamentally reformed the previous scheme by shifting the focus toward 'activation' and the reduction of public expenditure (Potůček, 2004, Sirovátka 2014). Compared to the changes in following years, which had followed same logic, the new act had a stronger expert (analytical) background, aimed at increasing labour market involvement through financial incentives, based on "work must pay" principle (the measures are discussed in detail in the article Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households in chapter 3.2).

[25] To complete the overview, it is important to mention that similarly to many other countries, unemployed person in the Czech Republic has a right to claim insurance-based *unemployment support (podpora v nezaměstnanosti)*, which is based on person previous income and does not take into account financial situation of the household. The support had never been generous, but the extent and length of the support had been further reduced during 2011/2012 social reform (with the certain it lasts maximum 5 month, during which in decreases from 60 to 45% of income)

However, the overall framing also strongly contributed to to the image of a work-shy welfare recipients. The explanation of the proposal (*důvodová zpráva*) [26] stated:

> *Material Distress Assistance Act ties the support to an assessment of person's activity in raising the income on their own* ("vlastním přičiněním"). *Above all, it is about the motivation to take up employment, even a lower-paid employment. At the same time, it creates the conditions for individual social work with the recipients, thus ensuring needed inclusion* ("potřebné začlenění") *of these people into society. In doing so, it is based on the principle of individual responsibility for one's social position.* (authors own translation, emphasis added)

The above-mentioned quotation shows that the legislation – introduced by social-democrat government – had been embedded in the neoliberal approach to welfare, described in previous chapters: emphasis on individual responsibility, employment (independent of its quality), treating benefit claimant (i.e., person with low income/unemployed) as socially excluded. It also disconnected[27] the indexations of the benefits from actual prices, subjecting it to the political negation. Consequently, it had been valorised only three times (in 2012, 2020 and the most recently in 2022).

The logic of austerity and activation, combined with increasing prominence of the image of social assistance recipients as "work-shy", impacted further amendments of the act in the following years (2006-2012), under a right-wing government (Sirovátka 2016). These reforms were shaped by workfarist approaches, i.e., requiring people to work in return for social assistance benefits. The toughest workfare approaches peaked in the 2011–2012 "social reform", taking form of introduction of obligatory public services[28], expenditures control of benefit recipients (special card for benefit payment), behaviour control (obligatory appointments with a sole purpose of control), etc. Most of these measures had been abandoned not more than a year after their introduction, partly because they were found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and partly due to political changes (Kotrusová, Výborná, 2015; Sirovátka, 2016). Yet, they helped to "take the existing system apart", in this sense the logic of the reforms prevailed (Sirovátka 2016, Grundělová 2020).

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[26] Poslanecká sněmovna 2005, IV. volební období: 1063 Vládní návrh na vydání zákona o pomoci v hmotné nouzi

[27] 2008 amendment of the Material Distress Assistance Act.

[28] Public works had been temporally obligatory for (almost) all people registered as unemployed, including recipients of insurance-based unemployment support.

Till the 2011–2012 social reform, social assistance scheme had been administered by (larger) municipalities, usually by their social departments. Social assistance for unemployed had been conditional upon a registration as jobseekers at the Labour office (*Úřad práce*). However, there was no legislative base for cooperation between Labour offices and municipal social departments (Sirovátka 2016). Nonetheless, it provided municipalities with considerable control over the payments of social benefits, which had been sometimes used as a tool of control (Trlifajová et al 2016). With the 2011/12 social reforms, the administration of social assistance is transferred from municipalities to Labour offices, with the aim of closer connection between social and employment policies (Sirovátka 2016). It also limited municipal control over the benefit payments.

The above-described changes in social benefit systems had been paralleled by decreased labour market protection and increased conditionality in employment policies. Despite some expansion of social protection under the Social Democratic government, the last decades were also marked by decreasing values of the minimum wage (which in the course of time became one of the lowest in the EU, Eurostat 2016a, Eurostat 2022b) and the insurance-based unemployment support (amount and length of the support had been significantly decreased in 2007 and again during 2011). The introduction of the New Employment Act in 2004 and particularly its amendment in 2008 also emphasised the activation of unemployment support recipients (including both financial sanctions and incentives, as well as direct sanctions, for example in case of refusal of temporary jobs). The activation and labour market inclusion as a core principle as a principle of social support and social service provision had been also promoted through projects of the European Social Fund[29], which also brought increased number of non-governmental actors (Sirovátka 2009a, Saxonberg, Sirovátka, Janoušková 2013, Sirovátka 2016).

All these shifts brought a decline in preventive measures and a shift towards more targeted and conditional support aimed at both unemployed and low-income households. The idea of

[29] A particular subprime segment had been created around state-subsidised employment (veřejně prospěšné práce), a program which allows creating temporary full-time jobs, usually on the municipal level, offered to long term-unemployed - benefits recipients. The program had been highly popular among municipalities, as it offered free labour force, primarily employed in public space maintenance and cleaning. However, existing evaluations show that for most participants, these jobs did not bring a change in their position in the labour market. Unless there is additional support, most participants are cycling between subsidised unemployment and temporary, often semi-formal jobs (Wladyniak et al 2019, Novák et al 2021).

"activation", image of work-avoiding benefit recipients had been particularly strong on the level of narrative (framing of the reforms) and in concrete legislative and non-legislative measures, while the capacities for implementation remained limited. According to Sirovátka (2016: 275) this led to enforcement of simple forms of radical activation but did not create conditions for "more balanced approach to activation and individual casework". According to Grundelova's (2021) research on long-term unemployment, the activation in the Czech context takes form of "discourage policy", which serves primary to reduce of number of clients and consequently expenditures on social benefits. Janebová (2022) observes a simultaneous trend toward greater control of recipients in social services. On the level of social service provision, above-described process brought a shift towards increased individualisation of responsibility, and consequent emphasis on monitoring of (desired) behaviour in standardised tools used for client and situation assessment. According to her findings, activities expected of workers regarding social assistance[30] could in fact be renamed "social policing", with the practitioners termed "social investigators" (Janebová 2022:12).

In contrast to other countries with strong impact of neoliberalism, these processes had not been paralleled by the extensive privatisation, despite increased involvement of non-governmental (both pro profit and non-profit) actors, particularly in social services provision / and within EU (ESF) funded projects. A new public management logic of efficacy had only led to the centralisation of welfare provision (limiting the power of local branches of Labour Offices). It also brought increased (albeit not always smoothly implemented) capacities for the control of benefit recipients (Hiekischová 2015, 2017) as well as local branches of Czech Labour Offices (Horák 2019).

[30] In her text, Janebová uses the term material assistance, but from the context is clear that it is a different translation of Czech term "hmotná nouze", referring to the Czech minimum income scheme.

3.1.2 Stigma and limited benefit coverage

The previous chapter summarizes how had the Czech system of social protection of low-income households been reduced to a strictly conditional system, similar to countries that embraced a neoliberal approach to social policies. As I discuss in greater detailed in the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia (chapter 3.3 of this thesis), thirty years after the "fall of communism" the experience of economic insecurity (inability to cover unexpected expenses, over-indebtedness, low wages and insecure jobs) impacts between 30 and 40% of households.

However, only small part of those people receives social support through the social benefit system. Both social assistance benefits and benefits targeted to low-income households within social assistance scheme (housing support, child allowance) are received by less than five, for some types of benefits (social assistance) it is even only around one or two percent of Czech households (Federičová, Kalíšková, Zapletalová 2022, Trlifajová 2021). In other words, these data only confirm that the Czech system of the social protection of the poor and low-income household had been reduced to minimal safety net, which covers only a small proportion of inhabitants that are facing some form of economic insecurity.

Limited protective role of social protection of low-income households is further amplified by high levels of non-take up. A recent analysis by Klusáček (2021) shows that less than one fifth of the eligible household apply for housing benefit. The number is higher for household with children but drops to only ten percent for households of seniors. Similar finding (the overall estimation approached one quarter) had been confirmed in a recent study by Federičová, Kalíšková, Zapletalová (2022), which shows that similar level of benefit non-take up even in so-called socially excluded localities, which are main recipients of targeted state policies of social inclusion (as I further discuss in chapter 3.3).

According to accessible data, this system of social protection of unemployed, low-income households does not have a strong legitimacy. According to Saxonberg, Sirovátka, Janoušková (2013), workfarist reforms from 2011/2012 increased the stigmatisation of support targeted to low-income and unemployed households. In recent quantitative research by Greš, Kropáček (2022) nearly 70% of respondents agreed with a statement that "Welfare benefits in the Czech Republic are often abused and received by people who do not deserve them". Similarly to the Gilens's analysis from the USA (see chapter 2.6), this distrust toward

social benefits system does not preclude overall strong support for welfare state in the Czech Republic, which had not changed (declined) over time (Linek, Petrusek 2021: 125).

Repeated research had shown that benefit claiming is perceived as stigmatizing, humiliating process also by its claimants. As one (Roma) women described it to me “I feel like scum, like a lesser human being” (Trlifajová et al 2015:46). Similar experience had been described to Mertl (2016:200) by one of unemployed welfare recipients: ¨I was often tormented by feelings of uselessness, I felt absolutely frustrated”. Or by Grundelova (2021: 574) in more recent research on Czech activation policies: “You’re something less than others because you’re registered in an employment office”. Furthermore, in my research the recipient often wanted to distance themselves from other benefit claimant (Trlifajová et al 2015).

There are no analyses which would directly contrast low levels of benefit coverage with a private provision (privately provided financial products, such as insurance or loans). However, Kubala and Hoření Samec (2021) show that Czech state supports the use of mortgages (with the goal of private homeownership) as a desired model for housing policies. Incentives included mortgage loan interest tax deduction or extensive state support of housing saving schemes, making it predominant form of housing support, particularly for the middle class. While housing support benefit had been claimed by less than 5% of households in 2020 (Federičová, Kalíšková, Zapletalová 2022), over 20% households had been paying mortgage or housing loan (Eurostat 2021).

Accessible data on over-indebtedness show that consumer loans had become an important source for those who were struggling to cover housing cost or unexpected expenses. At its peak (2016), over-indebtedness impacted nearly one in ten inhabitants, i.e. several times more than percentage of people who are receiving social benefits, disproportionally affecting poorer regions and those with lower income (Medián 2018, Mapa exekucí 2018). This might indicate that similarly to some other countries (Soederberg 2014), nonbanking consumer loans had for part of low-income households (particularly low-income working poor) replaced system of social protection provided by state. In 2020 around 1% household received support through social assistance scheme (CERGE), while nearly 8% were facing debt enforcement (income and property seizure) and their income could be lower that income of unemployed person receiving social benefits (Hábl et al 2021).

3.2 Widening Gap between the Experience of Poor/Low-income Households and the Construction of welfare

As I have said in the Introduction, when I had started my PhD studies, I have been asking myself the question why the Czech system of protection of poor, low-income households and particularly social benefits, does not react to the experience of the poor and low-income households, particularly to the experience of increased precarity and low-wage labour market – as I have encountered it in my research (Hurle, Kučera, Trlifajová, 2013, Trlifajová et al 2015). The previous chapter had shown that the Czech system of social protection targeted towards poor and low-income households had been strongly impacted by neoliberalism. With this in mind, the aim of this part is to examine why such construction of welfare increasingly distant from the experience poverty and economic insecurity in the Czech Republic. It is also a search for reply to the first main question of this thesis (Why is the construction of the system of social protection distant from the experience of the poor?).

I have already shown in the previous chapter, that social benefits system targeted towards poor and low-income households had turned into residual system, which is accessible only to a small proportion of inhabitants who are facing economic insecurity (and used by even smaller one). There is a strong emphasis on the "activation" and labour market inclusion of its recipients. It is stigmatized (and stigmatizing towards its recipients) and has a low legitimacy. What I want to examine in this chapter – in reply to above mentioned question – is that the problem of current system of social protection of poor and low-income households does not lie only in its *residuality* and *stigma*, but also in the *construction*, i.e. in widening gap between the image of welfare recipient and reality of these people - a gap between the expertly/politically constructed polices, shaped by neoliberalism, and every-day experience of welfare recipients, shaped by labour market precarity and limited social and labour protection.

To do so, I focus on the principle of work must pay policies and their implementation in the Czech context[31]. Microsimulation based on this principle calculates the difference between

[31] The principle of "work must pay" has influenced the formulation of social policies in the last two decades. This concept is closely linked to New Labour's policies and 1990s welfare-to-work

income from work and social benefits to ensure that people who work are financially better off than those who do not work. It had also served as an important tool to promote and evaluate social policies on international level (EU, OECD). In the Czech context, it had been used as one of the core principles for the construction of the current Czech social benefit system, particularly social assistance scheme. I have published an analysis of these policies in an article *Work must pay: Does it? Precarious employment and employment motivation for low-income households***,** in the Journal of European Social Policy in 2019.

The article contrasts the presumptions of "making work pay" policies with the everyday experience of social benefit recipients. It shows that the modelling of financial employment incentives and the public policies based on these calculations often does not correspond with the reality of benefit recipients who are often overindebted, cycling in and out of precarious forms of employment. The main claim of the article is that a truly functioning financial incentive would need to focus not solely on the difference in income between those who work and those who do not work. Rather it should analyse what type of arrangements allow working households to rise permanently above the poverty line. We have with my colleagues further re-examined these argument in the subsequent applied-research projects: a qualitative study focusing on employment motivation and perception of quality of work conducted with my colleague Ludmila Wladyniak (Wladyniak, Trlifajová, Kudrnáčová 2019) and another microsimulation-based analysis pointing to limits of social protection of overindebted workers (Trlifajová, Fejfar, Pospíšill 2018), consequently proposing a more nuanced approach to employment policies with emphasis on the complexity of support, adequate income and quality of work (Novák, Podlaha, Trlifajová 2021).

However, as much as this work provides a background for a call for a shift in the approach to social and employment policies, I included this article primarily to show the discrepancy between the changing everyday reality of welfare recipients in the Czech Republic and predominant framing of these policies. It also points to the ideological underpinning of a seemingly neutral, technical expert-based approach to the construction and evaluation of the social benefits system. In a way, it is another piece of puzzle which confirms growing distance between the construction of social policies and the experience and need of the poor

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programmes as part of attempts to reconstitute the welfare state in line with the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility and the fight against welfare dependency.

and low-income households under neoliberalism, which had been discussed in the previous chapters (particularly chapter 2.3 and 2.5).

Before proceeding to the article, I add a brief subchapter to strengthen the argument about precarity and economic insecurity in the Czech Republic, and possible ways in which it is impacting much larger strata of population than the actual social benefit recipients.

3.2.1 Low wages and precarity in the Czech Republic

Different source of the data on the character of economic insecurity are summarized and critically evaluated in the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia (part 3.3). As I show in this chapter, between 30 and 40% of households had experienced economic insecurity (inability to cover unexpected expenses, over-indebtedness, low wages and insecure jobs) in the past years. With unemployment around 2%, most of these people were employed, although the existing measurement of poverty / in-work poverty capture only part of them[32].

The data on the level of precarisation in the Czech Republic are limited. Compared to other EU countries, the proportion of Czech employees with temporary jobs is low (OECD 2022a), and it is estimated that labour agencies focus primarily on migrant workers (and some low-skilled workers). The only larger-scale analysis was conducted in 2009 (Sirovátka, Winkler, Žižlavský 2009), which pointed to the potential danger of dualisation of the labour market, with low-wage, less educated workers more concentrated in the precarious segment of the market. These high level of precarisation between the most vulnerable groups had been confirmed in our own qualitative research between unemployed and welfare recipient. Analysis of working trajectories of these people show increased instability and temporality of accessible employment (Trlifajová et al 2015, Wladyniak, Trlifajová, Kudrnáčová 2019).

There are multiple smaller scale[33] and qualitative studies which show impact of the process of precarisation on different groups of population. Černušáková (2021) shows how these

[32] Due the fact that poverty measurement does not reflect the need of the households / replicate lower standards of a low-wage economy. I further discuss it in the chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment (in the chapter 3.3). See also Prokop (2019).

[33] The estimation by Spurný (2018) using EU-LFS data (*Výběrové šetření pracovních si*l) assesses that precarious work had been between 2015-2018 the most prevalent among low-skilled workers (9%) and in services (4%). However, due to the limited accessibility of data, Spurný narrows down the

processes unequally impact Roma, whose limited access to other than low-paid, precarious and informal work (particularly in construction, recycling, and street cleaning) is amplified by state polices. However, precarity impacts disproportionately also groups that are usually not perceived as primarily target of social policies, such women, particularly women with children[34]. It becomes increasingly researched as a problem of lower-middle class positions as well as in higher-skill sectors (such as retail or architecture[35]). An analysis by Martišková and Sedláková (2016) points to an increase in the precarious forms of employment after the 2008 economic crisis.

A particular sub-group is represented by self-employed. The Czech Republic has one of the highest proportions of self-employed people in the EU (16%, OECD 2022b). Self-employment is most spread in construction, wholesale, retail, and manufacturing (Martišková and Sedláková 2016). Most self-employed people have limited access to social benefits targeted at low-income households. Furthermore, they are even excluded from certain types of insurance-based benefits (Svobodová, Trlifajová 2021, Svobodová, Trlifajová, Zieglerová 2020).

The increased vulnerability of precarious works become visible also during the recent COVID outbreak[36]. There is also growing awareness of potential negative impact of the platform economy on the precarious working conditions (these debates are mainly on the level of expert media, with limited data and research).

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definition of precarious work to involuntary work on a temporary contract/involuntary part-time job and fewer working than desired.

[34] Some analyses of precarious work have also been conducted from the gender perspective (Formánková, Křížková 2015, Volejníčková, Švarcová, Křižová 2019), focusing more on the processes of precarisation, emphasising the vulnerability of mothers with children on the labour market.

[35] Bek (2019) published a case study on the precarious work in supermarkets focusing on the transfer of the risk to the workers. Lokšová, Pomyjová (2020) focused on working condition of young architects, as segment of the labour market with normalised precarious work.

[36] I have conducted a small-scale qualitative study on the impact of precarious work during the COVID pandemic with my colleagues in SPOT (Svobodová, Trlifajová 2021, Svobodová, Trlifajová, Zieglerová 2020).

3.2.2 ARTICLE: Work must pay. Does it? Precarious Employment and Employment Motivation for Low-income Households[37]

Lucie Trlifajová, **Jakob Hurrle**[38]

Full citation

Trlifajová, L., & Hurrle, J. (2019). Work must pay: Does it? Precarious employment and employment motivation for low-income households. *Journal of European Social Policy,* 29(3), 376–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928718805870

Abstract

One of the core dilemmas of current welfare politics is the question of how to ensure social protection while providing incentives to seek employment at the same time. A way to address this dilemma is to base policies and policy models on the principle notion that "work must pay" - i.e. income from employment should be higher than social support of unemployed. The microsimulation models based on the notion that "work must pay" had been used in analyses evaluating the impact of policies aiming to enhance the financial reward from employment, pointing to some important problems in the construction of welfare support, or evaluating the impact of welfare reforms on financial incentives for employment.

However, how accurately do these approaches and models represent the reality of benefit recipients, particularly in the context of the increased precariusness of employment? This question is particularly salient in the face of the trend toward a highly flexible and deregulated labour market. We contrast the presumptions of "making work pay" policies with the everyday experience of welfare recipients,

[37] The study was supported by the Charles University project GA UK No. 376216 and by the Charles University Specific Academic Research Projects Competition project No. 260462

[38] Charles University, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development

aiming to understand to which extent the models based on this paradigm are able to capture the complex realities of benefit recipients. In order to examine this question, we replicated household microsimulation studies using qualitative research methods based on interviews with benefit recipients and administrators in two disadvantaged regions in the Czech Republic.

We believe that Czech Republic serves as a good case to the possibilities of modelling financial motivations for employment. The notion that work must pay shaped the direction of the Czech welfare reforms over the past ten years, bringing in the logic that the state should support labour market participation by widening the difference between the disposable income of employed and unemployed citizens. Further, we can observe trends towards increasing precarity in certain segments of the Czech labour market and a rising proportion in long-term unemployment, which allows us to observe the impact of these trends.

Looking on labour market trajectories and economic strategies of low-income households in the Czech Republic, we show how increasingly precarious character of accessible employment and high levels of indebtedness shaped their situation, blurring of the borders between reliance on welfare support and employment as a main source of income.

Our main claim is that the very idea of the “work must pay” approach focuses on the wrong question. Neither low-wage employment nor benefits offered adequate income to cover the expenses of the households. The respondents were combining the income from employment and/or welfare benefits with informal employment, support from wider family and loans, finding themselves in a vicious circle – the sources of income changed but the employment did not allow them to step out of the situation of poverty. A truly functioning financial incentive would need to focus not solely on the difference in income between those who work and those who do not work, but rather should analyse what type of arrangements allow working households to rise permanently above the poverty line.

Introduction

One of the leitmotifs for reforms of labour markets and social protection systems in many European countries during the last two decades has been the notion that “work

must pay". On one side, the attractiveness of the notion is closely linked to its intelligibility to the general public, promising to tackle the perceived negative impact of a supposedly overgenerous welfare state. On the other side, "work must pay" refers to the desire to reform welfare systems and labour market regulations in order to increase the efficiency of the system, which should provide social protection and incentives for accepting employment. In this sense "work must pay" principles are used in models by international organisation such as OECD that seek to compare the efficiency of its member states´ welfare systems.

While acknowledging the usefulness of models and calculations, which attempt to simulate the impact of a change of employment status on household income, we need to ask how accurately models, which are based on the principle that "work must pay" and which measure the financial motivations for employment, represent the reality of welfare recipients. This question is particularly salient in the face of the trend toward a highly flexible and deregulated labour market. While there are significant differences between countries, people in marginalised positions in the labour market are often pushed into precarious or atypical forms of employment (Rueda 2005, Emmenegger et al 2012) and in-work poverty and recurrent poverty is becoming as important an issue as unemployment (Crettaz 2013, Shildrick et al 2012).

The text critically examines policy implications and possible shortcomings of the notion that "work must pay" in the specific environment of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Czechia´s social and economic environment offers an interesting opportunity to critically reflect on the applicability of the "work must pay" logic. While the international literature on "work must pay" policies focused mostly on Western countries, the notion has been resonating strongly in the Czech Republic and had shaped country policies in the past decade. The Czech Republic has a very low wage level, with the minimal wage being at the time of the research (2014/15) one of the lowest in the EU, not only that of neighbouring Eastern European countries like Poland and Slovakia, but also Turkey (OECD 2017). Arguably, the low wage level contributed to the popularity of "work must pay" policies, as there is widespread frustration about the small income difference between the working poor and the unemployed. Second, in the past decades, we can observe trends towards increasing precarity in certain segments of the labour market and a rising proportion

in long-term unemployment (Sirovátka, Winkler, Žižlavský 2009, Martiskova, Sedlakova 2016) which makes the Czech Republic a good case to test the impact of these trends on the possibilities of modelling financial motivations for employment.

The text proceeds as following: We will first briefly describe the theoretical context and presumptions of “making work pay” approaches. Then we discuss the development of the “making work pay” approach in the broader context of Czech social policy and summarise the findings from previous studies that sought to measure financial incentives for employment through household microsimulation models. In the main part, we compare the findings of the household microsimulations with the everyday experience of welfare recipients in disadvantaged regions of the Czech Republic. In order to be able to do so, we sought to cover households with the same composition as used in these microsimulations. The findings are structured into four parts. In each of them, we describe one factor which influences the position of vulnerable households on the labour market yet is not acknowledged in the microsimulations that were used to design policies.

Theoretical introduction – focus on ‘making work pay’

The development of welfare policies in the past decades brought across different welfare regimes. These are observable in the proliferation of activation schemes in which individual benefit recipients are often requested to demonstrate their availability for work (Clasen and Clegg 2007, Bonoli and Natali 2009, Bonoli 2010, Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck 2012, Taylor-Gooby et al 2015). The emphasis on the notion that “work must pay” is in line with these trends. The concept is closely linked to New Labour's policies and 1990s welfare-to-work programmes as part of attempts to re-constitute the welfare state in line with the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility, the fight against welfare dependency and market-driven solutions promoted by international organisation such as the OECD (Grey 2001, Mahon 2014).

By the late 1990s/early 2000s social policy analysis and recommendation on both the international and EU level become increasingly sensitive towards negative impacts of rising inequality and processes of social exclusion and marginalisation within the population (Mahon 2014, Hemerjick 2012). The need to address structural

issues (re)legitimised state intervention and spending, but the continuity of the neoliberal emphasis on labour market participation and efficiency led to the promotion of policy designs that maximises the returns of social expenditures, mainly through active employment and social participation (Jenson 2012, Kersbergen et al 2014, Rueda 2015).

The notion that “work must pay” gained new importance as a promise to address one of the core dilemmas of this approach to social policy – the struggle between the guarantee of social protection and stress on the labour market involvement of people at risk of unemployment (Bonoli, Natali 2012). “Making work pay” should ensure that the work is competitive with social benefits rates but also allows for the supplementation of wages and the provision of low-cost services. Policies designed to “make work pay” should be able to address the twin problem of persistent labour market difficulties and in-work poverty – to “get the incentives right” and find an equilibrium between social protection and pressure on labour market participation (Jenson 2009, Immervoll, Pearson 2009). As such, “make work pay” became one of the key tools for reducing benefit dependency and increasing labour market participation as articulated in the European Employment strategy, by which the European Commission sought to react to increased levels of long term unemployment in continental EU states (Porte et al 2001, De Lathouwer 2004, Verbist et al 2007, Matsaganis, Figari 2016).

The ability of different states to “make work pay” became an object of benchmarking. The calculation of the difference between welfare state payments and the financial rewards from employment became one of the tools used by both the OECD (Tax and Benefit Systems: OECD Indicators) and the European Commission (Tax and benefits indicators database / EUROMOD[)], when assessing the effectiveness of its member states´ labour market regulations. The microsimulation models based on the notion that “work must pay” had been used in analyses evaluating the impact of policies aiming to enhance the financial reward from employment, pointing to some important problems in the construction of welfare support, or evaluating the impact of welfare reforms on financial incentives for employment (Pearson, Scarpetta 2000, Blundell 2001, Danzinger et al 2002, Martin, Immervoll 2007, Immervoll, Pearson 2009, Bargain et al 2010, Figari 2010, Kurowska et al. 2015, Navicke, Lazutka 2016,

for CEE countries, a particularly interesting analysis of the costs of the formalisation of employment by Koettl and Weber 2012).

The financial incentive for employment is usually measured through household simulation techniques that compare the situation of households that are receiving welfare benefits with those that are employed. In these analyses the main focus is on the relationship between welfare payments, wages and taxation. The financial motivation is usually measured through the replacement rate, with focus on the potential “traps”, i.e. situations when the shift into employment (or wage increase) does not bring financial reward (OECD 2007, Matsaganis, Figari 2016).

Czech social Policies and the Principle of ´Make Work Pay´

With the limited coverage of unemployment support (Ministry 2016), the “making work pay” policies and models in the Czech Republic are usually linked to social assistance and other tax-based benefits. The social assistance scheme has low public legitimacy, as its perception is strongly shaped by the alleged polarity between the “working and contributing” majority and the “not working and not contributing” Roma minority, who are perceived as the main beneficiaries (Rabušic, Sirovátka 1999, Rat 2009). This perception amplified the overall trends towards “activation” and the reduction of public expenditure which shaped welfare reforms in the past decade.

The principle was applied in a number of government-funded studies, which sought to compare the income of working households with the income of unemployed households (Pavel 2005, Jahoda 2006, World Bank 2008, Žižlavský 2010, Trlifajova et all 2014, Hora, Vyhlídal 2016). Recommendations from these studies contributed to the direction of the Czech welfare reforms over the past ten years, bringing in the logic that the state should support labour market participation by widening the difference between the disposable income of employed and unemployed citizens.

The measure introduced since 2007 brought new forms of income testing, reduction of the minimum guaranteed income for “inactive” recipients, discretion over the indexation of benefits, reduction of benefits after 6 months, financial incentives for public service. Further, several changes in taxation and family benefits which shifted the support for (low-income) families from income-tested benefits toward in-work

support were introduced in this period (Průša et al 2013, Horáková et al 2013, Sirovátka 2014, Sirovátka 2016).

While these changes in the past ten years sought to tackle financial disincentives for employment in the social system, the centre-right government decided at the same time to freeze the minimum wage during most of this period. The minimum wage, one of the lowest in the EU (Eurostat 2016a), had stagnated between 2007 and 2014 (with the exception of a 500 CZK rise in 2012). Aiming to strengthen the economy´s competitiveness, this cheap labour strategy unintendedly undermined the goal of increasing the financial attractiveness of low wage employment. Consequently, the emphasis on financial incentives for employment, often explicitly translated into slogans like “work must pay”, remains one of the central goals in the social policies targeted towards low-income households and the unemployed across the political spectrum, with ongoing debate on the need to lower social benefits and extend in-work support.

Outcomes of work must pay microsimulation models in the Czech Republic

The effects of financial incentives for the employment of benefit recipients in the Czech Republic had been measured by several studies using microsimulation models (Pavel 2005, Jahoda 2006, World Bank 2008, Žižlavský 2010) that calculated the consequences of various employment choices on household income, using data from the period before the two above-mentioned major welfare reforms (2007 and 2012). A more current attempt to model these choices, focused particularly on the situation of low-income households (Trlifajova et al 2014).

In all of these analyses the authors used several model-type households (usually single adult households, single adults with children and two adult households with children) and calculated the impact of full-time employment at different wage levels on the overall financial situation (*disposable income*) of the previously unemployed household, whose income was composed solely of welfare benefits. Most of the analysis used the *marginal effective tax rates*, in order to assess the extent to which taxes and benefit loss reduce the financial gain from employment. The last of the analyses (Trlifajova et al 2014) also measured the *relative difference* in disposable household income before and after employment (percentage increase/decrease of

monthly income after covering housing) and the *absolute difference* in disposable income before and after employment (absolute increase/decrease of monthly income after covering housing).

According to these calculations (Trlifajova et al 2014), low-paid employment brings a relative income difference, but the absolute value is not high – it might be questionable whether it is sufficient even to cover the additional costs that come with employment, such as travel costs, food or childcare. Yet the calculations imply that if there are no additional costs, employment should be rewarding, both for households with and without children, for whom the difference in income is mostly due to child tax credit (in-work benefit conditional upon employment, delivered through employer monthly with the wage to one of the parents).

However, with low wage full-time employment, households with children still qualified for support from social assistance (and other benefits), as their income was below the state-defined poverty threshold. In this situation, the wage increase results only in modest increases of disposable household income (Trlifajova et al 2014).

Confronting the MPW with reality - methodology

To which extent do these findings correspond to the everyday experience of welfare recipients? As we have stated, we analyse making-work-pay-policies from a holistic perspective, aiming to understand to which extent the models based on this paradigm are able to capture the complex realities of benefit recipients. In order to examine this question, we will replicate household microsimulation studies using qualitative research methods based on interviews with benefit recipients and administrators.

Our aim was not to have a representative sample, but to conduct the research in a context that is typical for the largest group of the unemployed. The Czech Republic has seen a rapid rise in inter-regional differences since 1990 (Meier, Franke 2015). Unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, has a strong regional dimension (Ministry 2016); the unemployment rate is highest in structurally disadvantaged border regions, which are either of old-industrial or rural character. While the situation of such regions is usually discussed under the prism of the transition, it needs to also be seen much more broadly as part of the story of de-

industrialisation and industrial change, which had already affected workers with lower qualifications in Western countries much earlier. Hampl Müller (2011) refers to this double challenge by distinguishing between 'post-totalitarian´ and ´post-industrial´ transformations. Although - contrary to public perception - the problems of unemployment and poverty are not restricted to the Roma minority, due to a number of structural reasons and the long history of discrimination, Roma are overrepresented among the unemployed and benefit recipients (FRA 2012, Hurrle et al 2013). The last two decades saw a trend toward the exclusion of the Roma from the labour market and spatial concentration in so-called socially excluded localities, mostly located in these disadvantaged regions (GAC 2015). The trend towards segregation is driven by the absence of a co-ordinated policy of social housing on the national level, which has created a situation where populist local politicians have strong incentives to either concentrate unpopular populations in segregated localities or to encourage them to move somewhere else (Hurrle et al 2013).

Aiming to focus on regions with a higher concentration of people on the borderline between employment and welfare, the research was conducted in two of these regions. Both of them were facing a long-term decline of jobs and (in the Czech context) high levels of overall and long-term unemployment. The first one has an urban character with high levels of unemployment being mostly the result of the continuous process of de-industrialisation, while the second one has a more rural character, which also implied higher commuting costs. The decline started in this region in the mid-1990s with the closure of textile manufacturing.

The fieldwork was conducted between October 2014 and January 2015. While this was already a period of economic recovery in the Czech Republic, the recovery did not yet have an impact on the situation of local labour markets in the selected regions.

The core part of the research was based on in-depth interviews with low-income households on the border between welfare and employment (30 persons from 26 households). The main criterion for selection was current experience with social assistance schemes. Further, in order to be able to compare this experience with findings from the model, we needed to cover in each locality households with the same composition as previously used in the modelling – two adult households with children (represented by 12 households), one adult households with children (7

households), and households without children (7 households). Approximately half of the respondents were of Roma ethnicity. Multiple generation households as well as households with additional income, such as pensions, long-term care benefits, disability benefits or insurance-based unemployment benefit were excluded.

Both the economic situation of the household and the employment motivation represent sensitive issues (especially in the context of rising control and stigmatisation of welfare recipients in the Czech Republic). For this reason we used informal networks to contact the respondents. In each locality we cooperated with two or three local non-governmental social service providers to reach potential interview partners. While some of the potential interview partners were clients, others were acquaintances of the co-operating organisations´ staff members. The involvement of social service providers also allowed for the identification of households which, in the opinion of the service provider, represented typical problems of households on the border between welfare and employment in the region. Cooperation with multiple service providers helped us to check for individual bias. The respondents were offered a small remuneration for the interview, which – as we perceived – positively engendered a feeling of dignity and consequently mutual trust. The interviews attempted to capture the interview partners´ work trajectories, to see how welfare support and employment interlocked. They further focused on the economic situations of the households and experience with the welfare system (including knowledge of the system and access to information) as well as other sources of income.

In addition to this, a set of interviews was conducted with a total of 17 local labour market professionals: Labour office employees responsible for the administration of benefits and employment services on the local level (6), employees of a non-governmental organisation responsible for the implementation of employment projects (5), and local employers offering low-waged employment (6). This allowed us to better understand the wider context of the individual narratives. Furthermore, we have used these interviews as a means of triangulation (which does not imply that the narratives cannot be mutually conflicting).

The interviews with the low-income households allowed us to identity a number of key issues, which the respondents mentioned most often as crucial factors when explaining their position on the labour market, which were used for coding and

further analysis. The resulting structure was kept in the presentation of the findings in the following chapter, which is divided in four sections.

Based on the situations of our respondents described in the interviews we developed simplified scenarios and calculated the difference between unemployment and employment. In a first step, we used for this the methodology of microsimulations. The disposable income has been defined as the household´s resources after covering housing costs. Similar to previous models (Pavel 2005, Jahoda 2006, World Bank 2008, Žižlavský 2010, Trlifajova et all 2014) the status of unemployment was defined as the situation when a household receives all benefits to which it is entitled by law – child allowance, housing benefit and social assistance benefits (subsistence minimum and additional housing supplement). The employment was calculated with the inclusion of taxation (including monthly individual tax deduction and child tax credit, which is a form of in-work benefit) and obligatory health and social insurance for this type of employment. Benefits based on previous financial contributions (unemployment insurance) and pensions were excluded.

In a second step, we took also the factors into consideration, which had been identified as crucial in the interviews yet were not considered in the microsimulation methodologies. The calculation of these factors required the study of relevant tax and social welfare legislation and learning about its practical application by employers, labour offices and other relevant authorities.

This analysis revealed that the identified factors can change the financial incentives for the household in very significant ways. In order to illustrate our argument, four graphs were elaborated that demonstrate these effects. Please note that the scenarios had been simplified in order to reduce the amount of possible variations. Therefore the amounts in the graphs do not necessarily fully comply with the amounts mentioned in the quotes from interviewees.

Confronting the MPW with reality – everyday experience of welfare recipients

Making work pay is predicated on models that assume rational choices about stable, long-term employment. But the outcomes of the interviews has shown that the experience of benefit recipients is characterised by chaotic cycling in and out of low wage, precarious employment with important implications for the socio-economic

situation and strategies of the household. In the following part, we will focus on the four key areas most respondents mentioned when explaining their personal situation: 1. Accessibility of employment and its impact on the possible choices of the welfare recipients, 2. Knowledge of the system and its impact on the possibility to make a "rational" choice, 3. Difference between increase of income and the perception that employment is financially rewarding 4. Over-indebtedness and its impact on households´ strategies. These areas are crucial to understanding why the reality of the respondents differs in important ways from the inexplicit assumptions on which the previously described models are based.

Limits of accessible employment

The households on the border between welfare and employment are strongly impacted by the process of segmentation of the Czech labour market and the rising number of atypical or nonstandard employment relationships (see for. ex. Sirovátka et al 2009, Martiskova, Sedlakova 2016).

While the majority of the respondents had been employed in the 1990s with long-term full-time positions, the labour market trajectories in the following decade were shaped by an increase in part-time and temporary employment, prolonged periods of unemployment and the increased importance of public work schemes (temporary full-time low-skilled employment for minimum wage). However, while designed as temporary interventions that should support beneficiaries to make the transition into the private labour market (Sirovátka 2014), the public work schemes were – particularly by middle aged people and older – perceived as the only possibility for full time employment:

> *"I just couldn't find a job. Then I found that you could earn a bit at the employment office after the floods, and through that I went to the town council [public work] ... otherwise I'd never get a job, all me and my husband could get our hands on was just temporary part-time work..." (woman, couple, adult children)*

Next to the subsidised public work schemes, the respondents were most often employed through so called "employment agreements". The Czech Labour Code recognises two types of agreements on work that is performed outside of the employment relationship. These agreement contracts are designed for occasional work of limited scope as a more flexible alternative to an employment relationship. In

some cases this employment was temporary and/or part time, while in others it lasted for several months or even years. Some of the respondents employed through these agreements received additional money informally.

> *"I always have a temporary job in a hotel, always on a temporary contract… but the employer is decent, they pay ten thousand crowns on the contract and besides [outside the contract] they pay my health insurance." (woman, no family)*

Under certain circumstances (if the wage is 10 000 CZK or lower) these agreements do not have to include health and social insurance. Consequently, when employed, many respondents were covering the health insurance – which is obligatory in the Czech Republic – themselves. None of them paid pension insurance, as these payments are not obligatory and the costs were perceived as too high.

> *"I've never had really illegal work... I've always worked on [temporary] contracts, for seven years I worked like that for a businessman, who was a millionaire – and didn't even want to pay my social and health insurance. (...) Then I worked on a contract for a friend and he told me, look, Pepa, even if I give you [an employment contract with] the minimum wage, it's doesn't pay off." (man, couple, adult children)"*

The majority of respondents were moving back and forth between these types of employment and welfare support. While microsimulation models assume that people are employed full-time through a regular labour contract, which covers contributions to health insurance and pension funds, the more precarious combinations leave such costs to the employee. Even though the income might be slightly higher in some cases, the additional costs for health care significantly reduce the amount of money the household could spend to cover living costs.

Making work pay models neglect thus the crucial role of the nature and extent of labour market demand. The limited accessibility of employment strongly shaped the possible choices of the welfare recipients we were interviewing – the available employment offers were often of a different character than the regular (full-time) employment that is used in the models for the calculation of financial incentives. Even if limiting our focus to formal employment, different forms lead to different levels of taxation, insurance payments and access to in-work benefits.

Limited knowledge of the system and benefit non-take up

The unstable situation of the labour market also influenced how the respondents thought about the question of whether it "pays to work". Most of them did not understand the system and their perception was usually based on anecdotal knowledge of experiences of other welfare recipients. The complexity of the system of welfare support, which consists of several types of benefits (with differentiated administration proceedings in different departments) means that the administrators themselves are often not familiar with the system as a whole.

> *"I don't really know what we're entitled to get. (...) The people at the unemployment office don't know anyway. Our housing benefit was reduced. When I didn't work, it was lower than when I did work – so I went there to ask and they said they didn't know; that it was what the computer calculated.... I have no idea how it's calculated." (woman, couple, 2 children)*

The difficulties with the estimation of the financial impact of employment were greater for those who were involved in temporary employment – as it has different impacts on different benefit payments due to different time frames used for the assessment of eligibility. Social assistance is evaluated on a monthly basis; housing subsidies are evaluated quarterly and child benefit once a year. Once the eligibility for the payment is established on the basis of the income situation in the past assessment period, it is paid through the following assessment period without considering changes of income that might occurred within this period of time.

Figure 1 illustrates the effect of these rules on the income of a single-parent household with two children in the case of temporary employment over a three-month period. In the first month of employment, the combination of earned income and reduced social benefits leads to a significant increase of income. The amount is lower in the following two months of employment, as the household benefits are lowered. However, the economic situation is still significantly better than in the times before entering employment. The opposite is true after employment had ended – however the social benefits do not return to the initial level immediately (month 5). In many cases, this is the moment when households become indebted.

Yet, in evaluating the models´ accuracy in calculating the financial incentives for employment, it was most striking that many of the respondents did not know about

the possibility of combining full-time employments and benefits; even when they did, in some cases they were told that they were not entitled:

> *"When I first went to apply for housing benefit, they told me I wasn't eligible: 'You earn 12 thousand crowns, you're living in luxury', and 'With such a wage you don't stand a chance.' Well and then they told me to move into a smaller flat... Most people would give up. They get fobbed off, but as I'm employed in social services, I knew I was entitled... In the end they said, 'well, try it then." (woman, no children)*

As we have shown in the previous part, according to microsimulations most households still qualify for support from social assistance (and other benefits), as their income was below the state-defined poverty threshold. Figure 2 below shows the impact of the non-take up of various benefits on the disposable income of a household of 1 adult and 2 children. The comparisons show how non-take up significantly reduces the financial benefit of employment in comparison to outcomes of the models. While the non-take up of any benefits shown in the case on the right is unlikely to occur often in the case of low-income families with children, the non-take up of social assistance (second case from the right) is likely to be much more common.

FIgure 1: Impact of temporary employement on household monthly disponsable income
(1 adult + 2 children)
3 month employement on agreements on work with monthly tax return, gross wage 10 000 CZK

Month 1 - no income from employement, all eligible benefits counted accordingly, no health insurance payement
M2 - income from employement, benefits in the same hight as previous month, health insurance payement
M3 - income from employement, housing benfits in the same hight as previous month (counted according to income in the 1st quarter of the year), social assistance reduced in reaction to income from employement, health insurance payement
M4 - housing benfits slightly reduced (counted according to income in the 2nd quarter of the year, i.e. M1-M3), otherwise same as M3
M5 - no income from employement, housing benfits same as previous month, social assistance does not react to decrease of income from employement (counted according to income from previous month), health insurance covered by state
M6 (*August*) - no income from employement, housing benfits same as previous month, social assistance increasead, compensating also decrease in housing benefits, health insurance covered by state

Source: Authors' own calculation, scenario derived from the field research

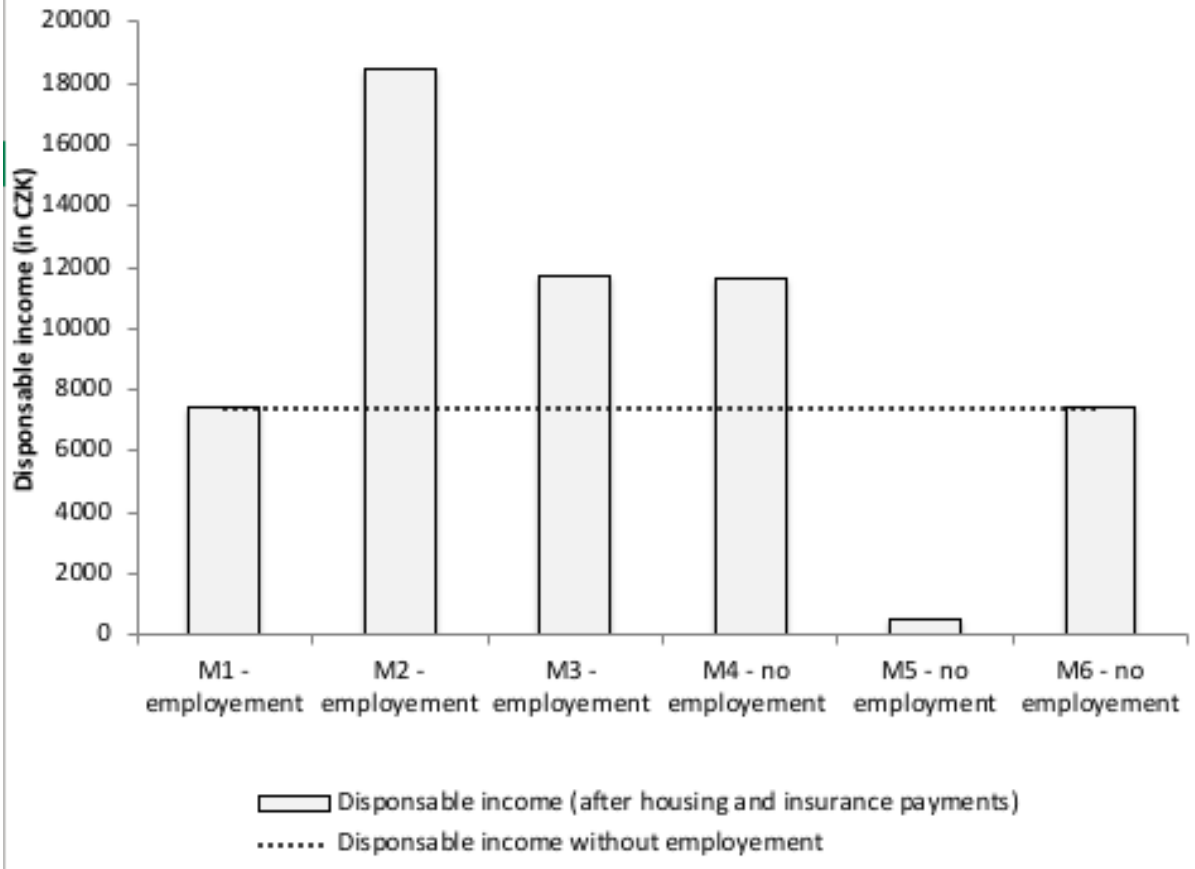

Figure 1: Impact of temporary employment on household disponsable income

Figure 2: Impact of benefit non-take up on household disponsable income (2 adults + 2 children, 1 person employed)

Source: Authors' own calculation, scenario derived from the field research

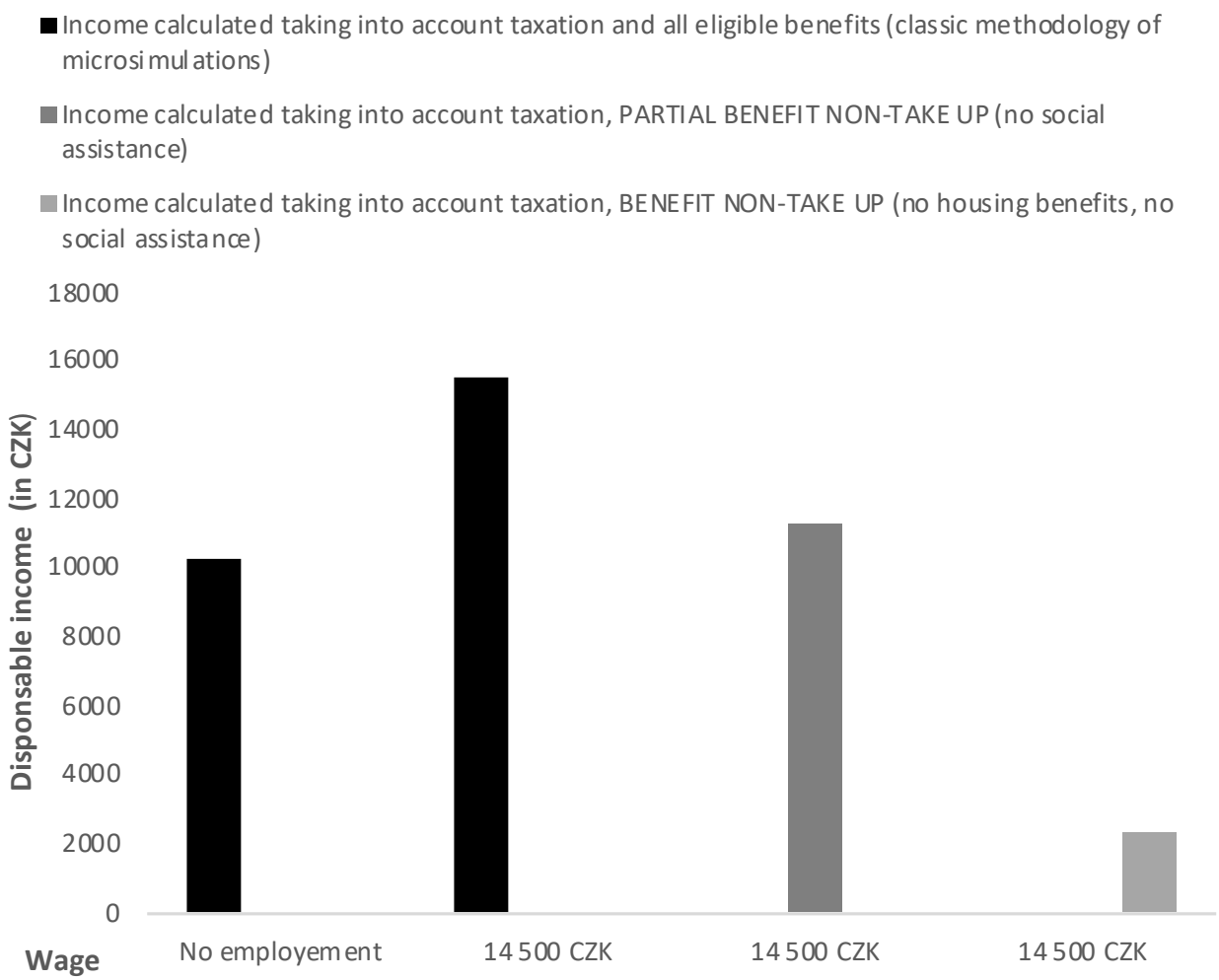

Figure 2: Impact of benefit non-take up on household disponsable income

One reason for this is limited awareness about the possibility of combining earned income with social assistance, which is often perceived as benefits for those who do not work. In addition to this, the acceptance of social assistance comes with strict restrictions and incursions into privacy. Combined with stigmatisation and lack of knowledge, this implies that many low-income households do not apply for social assistance if they are employed – even though their income is below the poverty level. This corresponds with data on social assistance recipients, which shows a low level of formal economic activity (Hora, Vyhlídal 2016).

The lack of knowledge of the benefits system and the high level of non-take up corresponds to the literature that points out that there is no evidence of the 'dependency culture' proposed by the political right (Dean, Taylor-Gooby 1992, Dunn, Grasso, Saunderset 2014). Further, and more importantly for our analysis, it shows that whereas general knowledge about the difference in income between full-time employment and benefits corresponded vaguely to the models, in many situations (such as temporary employment or low-wage employment) the benefit recipients were either unable to predict the financial impact or their knowledge was incorrect.

Income increase x financially motivating employment

So far we have discussed the knowledge of the difference in income with or without employment. However, the interviews showed that the difference in income per se does not imply that certain employment was perceived as *financially motivating*.

The financial motivation for accepting low-wage employment was strongest in single or two adult households because of the perceived impossibility of covering even basic needs from welfare support.

> *"If we lived only on the benefits, we'd get just 4,000 and we'd be screwed. We wouldn't make ends meet even if we ate only those Chinese instant noodles."*
> *(man, couple with adult children, employment at public works)*

However, for many households the *relative increase* of income resulting from employment was not motivating as the *absolute increase* of income was too low. This applied particularly when the employment required additional costs (commuting, food, childcare, etc.). These costs may not only reduce the financial reward from

employment, but even push the household into a situation where their income is lower than before accepting the employment.

> *"Now I got a job offer as a chambermaid, but for minimum wage and far away, and I don't have a driving licence. With the commuting they'd have to offer me at least 12,000 [CZK] gross, otherwise it won't pay off at all." (woman, 2 children)*

For many households, entering low-wage employment usually did not bring a *significant* change of income. It only brought a shift in the importance of different financial sources, shifting the main source of income from welfare support to employment. All households were combining the income from employment and/or social support with informal employment, support from wider family and loans.

> *"Now my husband gets paid 10,500 and I get 8,500, sol we get a lot. It's a great change from only 5,000... but those basic things like buying clothes, furniture - our [grown-up] son helps us with that." (woman, couple, 1 child)*

The quotations above also capture an important feature, which was present in most of the interviews – that neither low-wage employment nor benefits *per se* offer adequate income to cover the expenses of a household.

> *"Wages are low, that's the problem. It's not the high benefits. I haven't met a single person who could live off benefits. In that case they can't live off minimal wage either." (Head of a Job Counsellor unit)*

The necessity to combine different sources to cover basic needs increases the importance of informal employment as a critical additional source of income – informal employment thus becomes a "survival strategy" as it is described by MacDonald (1994) in the British post-industrial context. In the words of one of the respondents:

> *"Without some odd jobs we wouldn't even have enough to buy food... We had to take out a loan when the boys started their school, otherwise we wouldn't have made it. (...) We paid that off just thanks to those odd illegal jobs." (woman, couple, 3 children)*

This precarious position leads to the development of strategies beyond the reach of formal regulatory frameworks, which are further contributing to the continuation of irregularity resulting in growing informalisation (Slavnic 2009). The households find

themselves in a vicious circle, where the source of finances changes, but the overall financial impact is limited, as it often does not allow for stepping out of the situation of poverty and recurrent dependency on social support.

In this part, we have shown that the financial motivation for acceptance of low-wage employment, which appears rewarding in the models, might in reality be much lower. However, we need to emphasise that we were focusing on the financial aspects of motivation for employment. As could been seen from the employment trajectories of many of the respondents, the lack of financial motivation does not imply that employment might not be perceived as motivational for other non-financial reasons (social contact, status etc.) – as has also been outlined in some literature (Nordenmark 1999, Ervasti, Venetoklis 2010, Dunn et al 2014).

Over-indebtedness

Many of the households that were interviewed were over-indebted and faced a number of property seizures. According to the estimation of interviewed Labour Office employees, over half, in some cases three quarters, of welfare recipients are facing property seizures.

For these households, accepting formal employment might lead to a decrease of disposable income:

> *"I just got a job offer for 12,000, but it wouldn't pay off, I'll only go to work when my husband has a job and we'll be able to apply for insolvency. When I worked, we had 15,000 and now that we're at home, we have 17,000." (woman, couple, 2 children, low housing costs).* [39]

For over-indebted households, the financial incentive for employment is shaped by a different logic than the one used in the microsimulation models. Once the person is employed, the creditors seize part of their wages. As the entitlement for social assistance and housing benefits is calculated on the basis of income before wage seizure, the wage increases may not result in an increase of disposable income; in certain circumstances it can even result in an income reduction. This effect is

[39] The number does not correspond with the figures below, due to several factors – the figures show disposable income, whereas the respondent also included housing costs. In her case, the housing costs were lower than the normative limits used for the modelling.

illustrated in Figure 3 with the example of a household with two children. The black colour illustrates the situation of households without wage seizure. The microsimulation models allowed us to show that if the family is entitled to social benefits, substantial increases of earned income result only in modest increases of household income (Trlifajova et all 2014). However, when the wage is subject to wage seizure, the economic benefit from accepting work is reduced by almost half and the increase of wage does not result in economic improvements. In some cases,

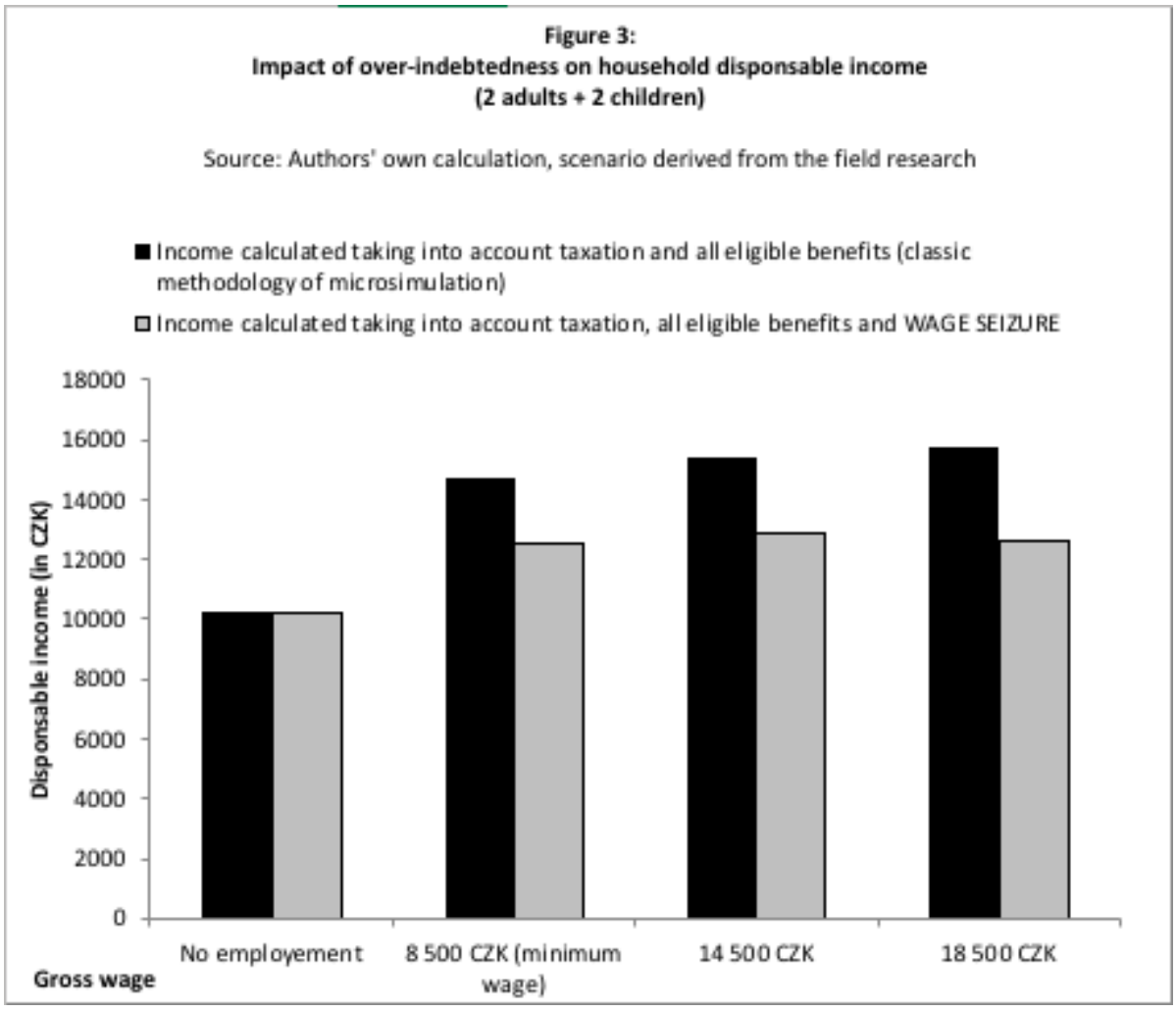

Figure 3: Impact of over-indebtedness on household disponsable income

it can even lead to a slight reduction of family income (two cases on the right). The final household disposable income considerably differs from the microsimulation models.

In order to explain the situation of over-indebted households, we further need to take into consideration that the effects of indebtedness are especially problematic in combination with the other factors mentioned previously. This could concern short-term employment illustrated in Figure 1, where wage seizure in those months with high income could dramatically reduce income. As indebted families do typically live without any financial reserves, accepting employment can thus turn into a highly risky option. Figure 4 illustrates the combination of wage seizure and non-take up of social assistance. Even though working families with income below living costs are entitled to social assistance, many people are not aware of this fact.

While we demonstrated already in Figure 2 how benefit non-take up increases vulnerability, this effect further increases when it is combined with wage seizure. When accepting employment at minimal wage without applying for social assistance, the household income is drastically lower (5709 CZK) than in the case of families living from social benefits without employment (10 250 CZK). While the family income rises with the rise of the salary, it is even in the case of the highest wage category included in the figure (gross wage of 18 500 CZK) lower than the income of a household whose members do not work. One result of this is extreme poverty, which often leads to new depts or the loss of housing. Another is a preference for semi-formal or informal employment.

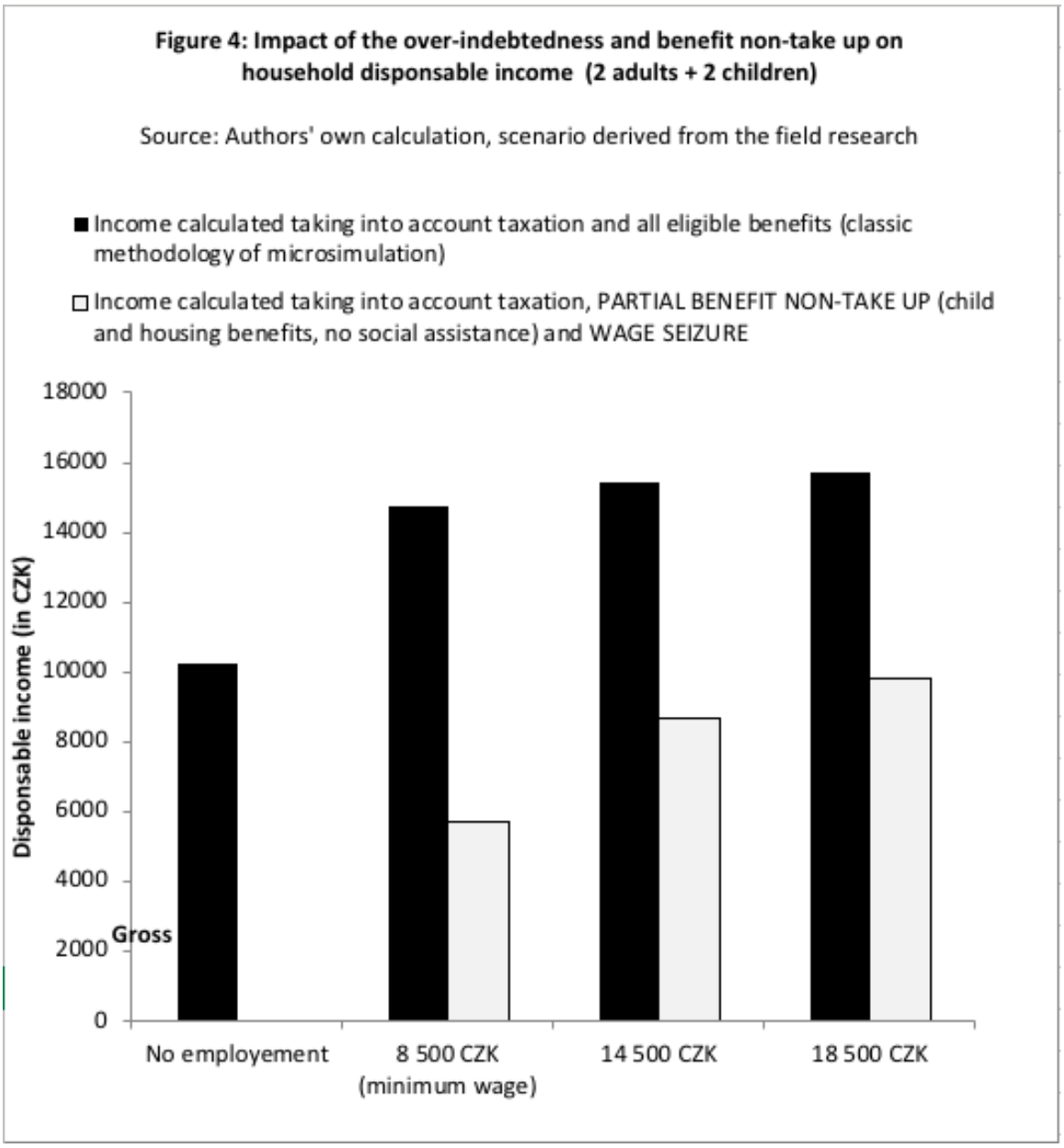

Figure 4: Impact of over indebtedness and benefit non-take up

On the other hand, the possibility of entering into the process of debt relief, which is conditional upon the ability to pay 30% of debts over five years, creates an important motivation for employment. For those with lower debts, even low-rewarding (though not temporary) employment may open the way to debt relief:

> *"If I had a proper job, with a wage of 20 or 25 thousand, I'd pay off the execution and we could live a normal life... That's what a neighbour of mine did. When he was young, he fooled around with some loans as well, but now he has a salary of 35,000. It took him five years to pay off the debt, but now it's all settled." (man, couple, 2 children)*

Given the extent of indebtedness in the Czech Republic and its concentration in the poorest households, these cases are not negligible. The level of over-indebtedness is one of the highest in the Europe (Angel and Heitzmann 2015). According to data from the Chamber of Bailiffs in 2016 published by research institutions and NGOs on a specialised website, one in ten Czech citizens live in an over-indebted household. Further, individual debts rapidly grow in time due to the inability to pay multiple loans from different creditors and high debt-collecting fees. The data shows that the problems of over-indebtedness are more concentrated in post-industrial regions with higher unemployment rates, and amongst the poorest groups of the population reaching between 18-33% in most places (Mapa exekucí 2018). The experience of over-indebtedness throughout the country is very common among those on the margins of the regular labour market.

Whereas we have previously pointed to certain limitations of modelling employment motivation, indebtedness, or more particularly the over-indebtedness of households, brings in new factors that are overlooked in the microsimulation models. However, these factors are central to the employment strategies of over-indebted households.

Conclusion

The principle of "work must pay" has influenced the formulation of social policies in the last two decades. Various policies were introduced to ensure that people who work are better off economically than those who do not work. The promotion and design of such policies is often based on microsimulation models, which aim to calculate the difference between income from work and social welfare.

Focusing on the case of the Czech Republic as an example of a low-wage economy, in this article we aimed to compare the models of financial incentives for employment with the real experience of people who live on the border between employment and welfare support.

Conducted in two disadvantaged regions, the interviews were realised with a relatively small group of people who had been identified by social service providers as making their livings along this borderline. Even though the size of the sample and the selection method does not allow us to consider our findings fully representative of the situation of this group in the Czech Republic, it is possible to draw a number of important conclusions that are of great relevance. The interviews revealed first that the Czech labour market has seen in recent years the rise of precarious forms of employment in the low-skill sector, corresponding to the processes of dualisation/segmentation of the labour market described in other countries.

The interviews further revealed that the calculations of financial incentives for employment do not often work in the way predicated by the mathematical model. Why do the models fail to represent this type of situation properly?

In order to understand the limits of models of financial incentives for employment, we must first return to their presumptions. Even though this is not always explicitly said, existing policies that were influenced by the “work must pay” idea seem to derive from the notion of a dichotomy between unemployment on the one hand and permanent full-time employment on the other hand. Similarly, the models for the calculation of financial incentives are usually based on regular full-time employment. The financial incentive is expressed as the difference between the household income before and after the acceptance of these types of employment.

The household simulation techniques are based on models assuming rational choices about stable, long-term employment. This implies that we expect that (a) an individual (or a household) is deciding between unemployment and acceptance of employment (entering the formal labour market), and (b) that his or her financial motivation is shaped by the difference of income in these two situations. Yet, if we aim to capture the situation of low-income households who find themselves in a precarious position on the labour market, both of these presumptions are problematic.

First, whereas permanent full-time employment is still prevalent in the Czech Republic, accessible employment opportunities for welfare recipients in disadvantaged regions did not often fit into the categories used in the modelling of financial incentives for employment.

This does not only mean that their income is taxed in different ways, but also that employment might bring additional costs (such as a need for the payment of health insurance) and/or that part of the reward might be paid outside of the formal agreement. Further, the households might not profit from in-work benefits targeted to low-income households (such as child tax benefit) that are used in the modelling.

The accessible forms of employment led to a blurring of the borders between reliance on welfare support and employment as a main source of income. The respondents were moving back and forth between employment and welfare support as a main source of income. With different timeframes used for the evaluation of a household´s eligibility for different types of benefits, the measurement of the financial impact becomes further complicated.

Second, recipients of benefits are often unable to predict correctly how a change of their employment status will affect their household income. One reason for this is the system´s complexity; the other one is the state´s reluctance to inform citizens proactively about their rights to social assistance. This could result in non-take up of benefits, which worsens the social situation of vulnerable families. Particularly in the context of the precarious character of accessible employment, the complexity and limited knowledge could also discourage unemployed people to actively seek employment, as changes tend to result in periods of financial instability.

Third, and maybe most importantly, it might be reductive to express the financial incentive by the difference between income before and after employment. In the households we interviewed neither low-wage employment nor benefits offered adequate income to cover the expenses of a household. The respondents were combining the income from employment and/or welfare benefits with informal employment, support from wider family and loans, finding themselves in a vicious circle – the sources of income changed but the employment did not allow them to step out of the situation of poverty. It also did not allow them to step out of the dependency on social support, which comes with strict obligations, monthly visits to

the labour office and the possibility of controls. This economic situation has led to the development of strategies beyond the reach of formal regulatory frameworks, contributing to a reproduction of irregularity resulting in growing informalisation. For people in such situations, restrictive types of “work must pay” policies that further complicate access to social support are not motivating, yet increase the risk of social exclusion.

Fourth, there is the issue of over-indebtedness, which introduces a different logic into both the perception of financial incentives for employment and its economic impact on household income. A large proportion of welfare recipients is facing multiple property seizures that strongly shape their economic strategies and that could contribute to the preference for employment on a precarious and/or informal basis.

The mathematical modelling of financial employment incentives and public policies, which were put into place on the basis of such calculations, do not correspond well with today´s reality of precarious work. Is it impossible to come up with improved models, which would more closely reflect the reality of low-income households in disadvantaged regions?

While it is certainly possible to construct more complex models, which are able to deal with the combination of social security dependence and semi-informal short-term work that was typical in the case of our respondents, it is less clear if it would be possible to “fine-tune” the existing mechanisms of the social state in a way that would be much more motivating. Based on the findings from the research, the “work must pay” approach might be criticised for focusing on the wrong question. A truly functioning financial incentive would need to focus not solely on the difference of income between those who work and those who do not work, but also analyse what type of arrangement would allow working households to rise permanently above the poverty line.

However, being able to calculate this difference would still be useful for people who consider how the acceptance of a temporary job might affect the financial situation of their family. While the “work must pay” approach is too simplistic to offer good guidance for the formulation of public policies, developing more complex (user-friendly) models, which would allow citizens both to check their current entitlements

and predict the impact of changes, could be useful on a practical level and strengthen the awareness of people in vulnerable situations.

3.3 Racialisation of Welfare as a Struggle over Dignity and Control?

Previous two chapter had shown that the experience of economic insecurity, low wages and in-work poverty impacts a large proportion of the economically active population. They also show that neither in-work poverty (economic insecurity) nor the situation of the precarious low-wage workers have been reflected in the construction of the social benefits system in the past decades. Similarly, the main target group of employment policies had always been unemployed[40], with particular - albeit sometimes performative - emphasis on long-term unemployed–benefit recipients.

Wouldn't an expected reaction be a call for wider, more inclusion social support, particularly by those who are not that well off? While multiple non-governmental projects have been looking for a more nuanced approach to low-income and unemployed people, I have observed quite the opposite process in many policy debates, particularly on the legislative level. When I participated in working groups and public debates, conducted interviews within applied researcher projects (see Appendix for overview) or just listened to the media, I have often encountered calls for increased restrictions in social benefits system and control of its recipients. These came particularly from the municipalities and regions which were the most impacted by economic insecurity, lower wages and higher level of poverty.

The aim of this chapter is to first verify that this experience had not only been my impression. However, once this has been established, the main goal – in line with the second question of this thesis – is to explain the reasons for a strong demand for increased restrictions and control. I follow the process of invisibilisation of economic insecurity experienced by a large proportion of the population and the establishment of (stigmatised) public image of poverty as a problem of a small group of social benefit recipient - Roma inhabitants of socially excluded localities. I examine how, and why this racialized image of poverty consequently turns the system social benefits into a tool of ethnic governmentality. Similarly, to the previous chapter (3.2), this part of thesis is based on texts, that that had already been / or are soon expected to be published.

[40] Or people at risk of unemployment, in case of larger scale layoffs.

The first text, a book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia focuses on the debate about poverty in the Czech Republic and its impact on the construction of social protection system. It examines the simultaneous process of invisibilisation of economic insecurity impact larger proportion of society and visibilisation of the Roma as underserving welfare recipient. The chapter examines why these processes resonate, particularly in the (post) -industrial regions. I show how the social benefits system becomes part of the struggle over a status and a feeling of dignity in the context of (rising) labour market insecurity, strongly perceived economic and social decay, shaped by processes often beyond the control of local inhabitants[41]. The chapter's main argument is that delegitimised social benefits are no longer approached as a tool of protection, but as an instrument for the control of the Roma population.

The aim of the article *From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma* (co-authored with Filip Pospíšil) is to further examine these claims through a more detailed case study. It follows parliamentary debates about the amendments to the minimum income scheme legislation proposed and accepted between 2014 and 2021 (i.e. since 2011/2012 "Social reform"). This is a period characterised by greater involvement of politicians representing the poorest regions of Czechia. They still follow the logic of control and surveillance of benefit recipients. However, as I show, the main goal of these changes is no longer labour market inclusion or economic efficiency, but a strengthening of the municipal power over benefit recipients.

Similar trend can by observed in debates about the housing support (příspěvek na bydlení) within the social assistance scheme, particularly ongoing calls from municipalities to reduce the ceilings in order to control movement of (Roma) benefit recipients (Kupka et al 2021, MPSV 2019, Trlifajová, Kučera 2019).

Using data from parliamentary debates around the minimum income scheme amendments, I examine how neoliberal reforms paved the way to a racialisation of welfare. I approach welfare from the perspective of social rights and, more generally, citizenship rights and their internal hierarchisation. I particularly focus on the construction of "undeserving poor", the racialisation of the welfare and the securitisation of its recipients. In line with the findings from the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia,

[41] In this part, I rely particularly on my previous case studies of North Bohemia's zero-tolerance policies that attempted to use social benefits as a tool to control Roma (Trlifajová et al 2016).

I show how the imagination of so-called "localities" and the spatial concentration of Roma welfare recipients become central to the debates. However, the main claim is that these developments are embedded in the seemingly colourblind neoliberal categories of deservingness which intertwine easily with existing local racial hierarchies.

Before I proceed to these two texts, I add a short chapter which offers a more detailed insight to the impact of conceptualisation and institutionalisation of the social inclusion policies in the Czech Republic and their impact on the visibilisation of poverty as a problem of Roma.

3.3.1 Social inclusion and visibility of spatially concentrated ethnic poverty[42]

Ever since the establishment of Czechoslovakia as an independent state, the Roma had been treated with suspicion, often facing unequal treatment, distrust and discrimination (Spurný 2011, van Baar 2012, Donert 2017). As they had been also between those strongest impacted by the changes after 1989 (employment insecurity/informality, housing insecurity, etc), it only confirmed public perception of the "dependency" and "misuse" of the welfare system (Rat 2009, van Baar 2012, Černušáková 2021).

However, in policy debates of the 1990s Roma and "pro-Roma" activities had been presented (framed) with emphasis on civic-political participation, mobilisation on ethnic, communitarian term, fight against racism. Socio-economic aspects or living conditions did not attract that much attention, neither as a public problem nor as a reason of unequal position of Roma. In line with predominant multiculturalist approach, the debates have been dominated by ethnic emancipation discourse[43] (Koubek 2013). Compared with the framing of following decades, the Roma had been treated as distinct but equal subject, not a failed one.

This changes in early 2000s, when the position of the Roma is increasingly framed as a "social" problem even by those aiming to represent their interests (Koubek 2013). This shift is embedded in the changes in EU policies. In 1993 the EU declared a protection of minority

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[42] I would like to thank Filip Pospíšil, Daniela Büchlerová (both ex-employee of Agency for Social Inclusion), Karel Čada (co-author of the 2006 and 2015 map of socially excluded localities) and Martin Šimáček (ex-director of the Agency for Social Inclusion) for providing useful clarification for elaboration of this part of the text.

[43] It is interesting – in the context of latter debates – that even in the field of labour marker, the emphasis had been on Roma entrepreneur activities, presented as a road to success and independency, a way a of emancipation (Koubek 2013).

rights and culture as one of the accession criteria. The position of the Roma in CEE countries had been subjected to repeated rounds of monitoring and reporting; "pro-Roma" organisations had access to special funding schemes. While it had been framed in the language of human rights / minority protection, the concern with the position of the Roma had been intertwined with security concerns. The anxieties over discrimination, welfare dependency and poverty of the Roma were also reflecting fears of (intra EU) migration (van Baar 2011).

While initially promoting cultural/communitarian activities, EU funding increasingly accentuated individualized, socio-economic dimensions of "Roma integration", moving the emphasis from minority rights to "social inclusion" perspective. This had become more pronounced in mid-2000s when primary source of funding shifted to EU structural fund. Poverty and "welfare dependency" become central to the debates aiming to ameliorate the position of the Roma and closely linked to unemployment instead of previous emphasis on discrimination (van Baar 2012, Koubek 2013).

Considerable support still targeted to the Roma had been claimed on the basis of "social exclusion", "difficulties to integrate" or "discrimination". Support for the Roma business activities, once framed as a road to economic emancipation, had been replaced by calls for employment support and opportunities, with the goal of alleviating the worst impact of social exclusion. Attention to civic and political participation of the Roma had declined, replaced by increased emphasis on professional (individualized) social service provision. The shift in the emphasis is also reflected in the Roma integration strategies, which since 2004 attempts to combine cultural a socio-economic aspect (Koubek 2013).

Similar features were also present in the national campaign "Destroy!" (*Likviduj!*[44]) by the People in Need non-profit organization, which aimed to highlight the growing problem of the spatial concentration of the Roma[45] (labelled as "ghettos" in the campaign) and worsening situation of its inhabitants. At the time (2005-2006), the campaign identified the reasons for the emergence of the Roma "ghettos" not only in the unequal social position of the Roma and discrimination, but also in their behaviour, culture. Such reasoning reflects (then very lively) Czech debate about the so-called culture of poverty (Toušek 2006), which emphasized the

[44] http://ceskaghetta.cz

[45] These processes are discussed in the chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia

self-replicating effects of the experience ("of the culture") of poverty - and in its consequence often placed responsibility for this situation on those who are poor/exclude.

In 2006, the first mapping of so-called "socially excluded Roma localities" took place (GAC 2006), partly in reaction to above mentioned debates, partly in reaction to evaluations of EU-funded projects, demanding that a part of these funds reach localities with a high share of segregated Roma (Hurrle et al. 2014). In the following year consultations with representatives of ministries, regional and municipal governments and NGOs took place, resulting in the establishment of the Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities in 2008, as one of the bodies of the Office of the Government[46]. The main goal of Agency had been prevention of "social exclusion" and support of integration of the Roma on municipal level (Government of the Czech Republic 2007). In 2009, after series of anti-Roma demonstration[47], the Agency also become responsible for drafting of the national Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion (Šimáček 2011), which focused mostly on the situation of the "socially excluded (Roma) localities".

Since the EU accession, the Czech Republic (similar to other member state) has been submitting two years action plans on social inclusion (Mareš, Sirovátka 2008). These had been elaborated independently from the Agency for Social Inclusion, by a department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs[48]. Here, social inclusion is framed in the EU (Eurostat) categories of measurement of poverty and social exclusion, and next to the Roma refers to multiple other targeted group (people with disabilities, youth, elderly, migrants, homeless people, people leaving institutions and ex-prisoners) (MPSV 2004, 2014) However, while other groups had been represented through the Ministry of Labour and Social affair, Agency for Social Inclusion had been the only independent state institution, visible both in public and media debates and – which is particularly important – in municipal policies. Despite dropping the suffix "Roma localities" both in the name of the Agency (2012) as well as in the following mapping of excluded localities (GAC 2015), it meant that in public discourse social inclusion/exclusion become closely associated with the Roma.

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[46] Till one 2019, when it had been transferred to the Ministry for Regional Development,

[47] Further discussed in the chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia

[48] There had been some changes over time and Agency for social inclusion cooperated on most recent strategy (MPSV 2020), but this was not the case in previous years.

The existence of Agency for social inclusion (unitedly) institutionally completed the narrowing of the image of the Roma as the main recipient of state social policies targeted to poor and low-income households. In the sense of debates in previous chapters, it confirmed the construction of the Roma as problematic "Other", outsider, while rest of the society appears as a non-problematic unit. It also it amplified in public discourse perception of spatial concentration of the Roma as a threat. The perception that even a small spatial concentration of the Roma (independently of their social situation) is a problem is hence on confirmed by the state. It often led to an (inappropriate) labelling of such places as "ghettos" (Hurrle et al. 2014). At the same time, the focus on municipal level, and intervention which often emphasised employment, education and individual social work with inhabitants of "localities", neglected other forms of poverty and economic deprivation (which often impact larger group of population) as well as structural factors behind them. Such framing unwittingly contributed to the racialisation and stigmatisation of these interventions and, more generally, of the debates about poverty.

3.3.2 BOOK CHAPTER: On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia *(O ekonomických periferiích a omezování sociálního státu v Česku[49])*

Full citation

Trlifajová L. (2021). O ekonomických periferiích a omezování sociálního státu v Česku In: Outrata, F. (Ed). *Demokracie-jak dál: Rizika a výzvy pro Česko a svět.* Praha: Vyšehrad.

Text had been originally published in Czech[50].

North Bohemia, May 2013. A small crowd gathers in the rain around a fountain in what is usually an abandoned town square and heads off to the part of town the Roma have been relocating to for some time upon the orders of the local council. Smoke bombs and tear gas cloud the air. Heavily armed riot police hide behind shields. 'Czechia belongs to the Czechs! Gas the gipsies!' Even those who usually do not endorse them publicly have joined this neo-Nazi march. Sitting in the kitchen of one of these houses a few years later, I can still feel the fear of the people targeted by this march. One woman tells me that some people who used to say hello to her in the shops began to spit on her.

Seven, ten years ago, many other Czech towns witnessed similar scenes, mainly in more peripheral, economically less prosperous regions. Led by black-clad neo-Nazis, both young and old, their bellies bulging, marched together. But the march also included families with children, mothers with prams and pensioners. Locals likely only made up a fraction of the march, but many who did not attend quietly agreed. Local media coverage and the response of local politicians reflected the quiet (or sometimes vocal) approval of a wide spectrum of residents. 'No more

[49] This work was supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic [grant no. GA20-04863S].

[50] Translation by Marie Chudomelová, Brad McGregor

patience for the unadaptable!' Small groups of people who came to support the local Roma population and police units specialising in conflict management completed the picture—the national media also joined later. For a moment, a place that would never usually attract attention was in the spotlight.

Anti-Romani demonstrations and the subsequent responses tend to run through the public sphere like an eruption of latent societal racism, only to be forgotten again. At the local level, however, these protests often instigate measures which are completely or are on the edge of being unconstitutional, such as the restriction of free movement in public spaces in areas with higher concentrations of Roma, police checks and surveillance of poorer people receiving benefits and so on. After the initial outrage of a few liberal media publications with modest numbers of readers pass, the measures usually remain at various levels of intensity, some even expanding to state-level politics.

We open with a scene from one of these anti-Romani marches because the events which took place in the squares of these small north Bohemia towns, such as Duchov, Litvínov, Nový Bor or Šluknov, are microcosms capturing the pathology of the debates on the adverse social situations and poverty that is found in Czechia. Demands for stricter policing of the Romani community by limiting government benefits have a significant influence on Czech social policies. These demands are often made by politicians who represent regions with a higher percentage of Roma people but also by people facing economic precarity.

This presents a paradox, as those calling for cuts in social policies are the people who most need the support they offer. This paradox is a reflection of our society's inability to identify and lead debates about various forms of poverty as well as adequate responses to them in public policy. It is also an expression of the long-standing frustration and discontent in that part of society most affected by the growing economic uncertainty in the country that has followed after 1989. In the dominant social discourse shaped by neoliberalism, the experience of these people has also long been delegitimised and stigmatised as a personal failure. These feelings are not specific to Czechia or Central Europe—we encounter various forms of their expression in a number of other countries, often in a post-industrial context.

The following text explores how the invisible experience of a segment of society, together with the ethnicisation of debates concerning social support, fundamentally shape Czech social policy focused on people with low or uncertain income, leads to more intense restrictions and conditions upon those who apply for benefits as well as their stigmatisation and, consequently, creates a weaker, more polarised society.

Czechia: The Country Where Social Dreams Come True?

In attempting to uncover the reasons low-income groups call for a weaker welfare state, we will start with large data sources which show what 'the experience of economic uncertainty' actually means in the Czech context and whom it affects.

Due to the parallel transformation of the Czech economy after 1989 and that of the global economy it was integrating into (Hampl, Müller 2011), the character of work and working conditions in Czechia underwent a radical change. The attractiveness of Czechia for foreign investors is rooted in several factors: it has a relatively qualified labour force that accepts low wages, a comparably stable legislative environment, a strategic geographical location in Europe (Pavlínek 2009, Drahokoupil 2009) and tax incentives which tend not to consider the quality of jobs created. Consequently, the employment rate in Czechia exceeds many other of the surrounding countries. Increasing demand for labour, especially for workers able to adapt to the flexible working conditions in manufacturing, led to a significant influx of foreign workers, which started at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Around the time it entered the European Union, Czechia became the first among post-communist countries to consider itself an immigration country, one which people move to for job opportunities rather than a country people leave to seek jobs elsewhere, as was the case in many neighbouring countries (Drbohlav 2012).

As Czechia integrated into the global economy more closely and as a rather peripheral player, pressure on flexibility, effectiveness/productivity and cost minimisation grew. Similar to other countries, this led to new forms of social and economic uncertainties, which affected certain groups of inhabitants more intensely than others depending on the character and stability of their employment but

especially on their ability to respond to uncertainty and fluctuations in their income (Pugh 2015). The Czech experience with these uncertainties is rather specific, and, for a long time, there were no tools to capture it. International comparative indicators of poverty, such as those used by the OECD or Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union), show Czechia to be among those countries with the lowest at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rates (Eurostat 2019c). Even more complex comparative data collected for the European Pillars of Social Rights show the country in a similarly positive light. According to this data, in 2018, Czechia had the best social situation among all EU states (Social Scoreboard 2018), comparable to the Scandinavian nations and often outperforming them. These results seemed to confirm the idea that the social and economic problems of people in Czechia do not represent a significant problem.

Figure 5: Examples of media responses to the statistics on poverty published by Eurostat.
Source: Lidové noviny 2010, Česká televize 2015, Český Rozhlas, 2017, Hospodářské noviny 2019.
(Translations of the titles: Česká televise: Young Europeans at Risk of Poverty. Czechs are Doing Better than Germans. / iRozhlas: Czechia Has the Lowest Poverty Rate in the European Union. Romania Highest. / Hospodářské noviny: Czechia Has the Lowest Income inequality in the EU. Czechs are also Least at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion, Eurostat data show)

The superior results of Czechia, however, do not reflect some forms of economic uncertainty due to the specific configuration of the indicators, which are used to measure poverty and living conditions. Let us then discuss the most frequently used indicators and the reasons Czechia does so well when measured by them. The most significant measure to determine poverty, which is often used on its own, is the *at-risk-of-poverty rate*. It captures the number of households which have less than

what is usual in a given society.[51] Despite the indicator's name claiming 'at-risk-of-poverty', it is built to reflect the distribution of income in society and, therefore, the rate of inequality. This is its most significant limitation: if a country is relatively equal, people who struggle to cover their living expenses might register as above the poverty threshold just because wages in the country are generally low. For historical and geographical reasons, the differences in income in different regions of the country are lower than in other post-communist countries. Moreover, the growth of inequality has not been as steep as in many Western liberal countries since the 1960s. Households which would be considered poor in other European countries are, consequently, placed above the poverty line in Czechia.

Another indicator often used when measuring social situations which helps push Czechia into a better position is the *employment rate*, that is, the labour force participation rate. The obvious presumption is that employment alone guarantees the social and economic standing of the individual. Over the last 15 years, Czechia has gone from scoring average among European countries to having one of the lowest unemployment rates (OECD 2020). When compared to other EU states, Czechia also has a low percentage of part-time jobs and temporary contracts, even though that percentage grew following the 2008 economic crisis (Martišková, Sedláková 2016). The current COVID-19 pandemic also drew attention to the vulnerability of these positions (Svobodová, Trlifajová 2021). The *material deprivation rate* is the last significant indicator used for measuring poverty. It is used to identify the number of households unable to afford basic necessities. For many years, this rate[52] referred to the sum of several items a household is unable to purchase (severe material deprivation), and the percentages in Czechia were mostly in the single digits. The country's rates consistently moved around the EU average (Eurostat 2019c), but the

[51] Usually, 60% of the median equalised household income, which is income divided by the number of household members.

[52] It was not until 2019 when the calculations started to prioritise the ability of a household to pay for an unexpected expense over the itemised lists of indicators—an unexpected expense was originally one of the indicators listed.

low number again seemed to confirm that poverty is not a concern for a significant part of the population.

In summary, Czechia's good performance in international statistics is a consequence of a high employment rate and low-income inequality, which affect the international indicators for measuring poverty. Based on this data, we can conclude that 'severe' poverty, meaning an inability to cover basic living expenses, is not an issue facing a large percentage of people in Czechia. People have jobs, and the distribution of income throughout the population is relatively equal. These findings are important. Nevertheless, suppose this is where discussion vis-à-vis the economic situation of households ends. What remains unconsidered is the experience of economic uncertainty, which affects a much larger part of society.

Economic Uncertainty as a Shared Experience among a Large Segment of Society

One key factor influencing the situation of Czech households is the low level of wages in the country. While only a small segment of the population, compared to other EU countries, deals with 'severe' poverty and unemployment, the wages in Czechia are consistently among the lowest in Europe. In both absolute and relative terms, the Czech minimum wage has consistently ranked among the lowest in the European Union (Eurostat 2019a). However, this proves true for more than just the minimum wage, which only affects a relatively small part of the population. The issue of low wages affects even employees with average or median income. When we compare the purchasing power parity of wages, meaning what one's wage is able to purchase, Czechia sinks to one of the poorest EU states, behind Poland and Slovakia (Eurostat 2019b). Gross hourly earnings in Czechia are three-fifths the EU average (Kamenický 2019). For context, we may add that other countries with similarly low wages have a high percentage of their population working abroad for significantly higher wages.

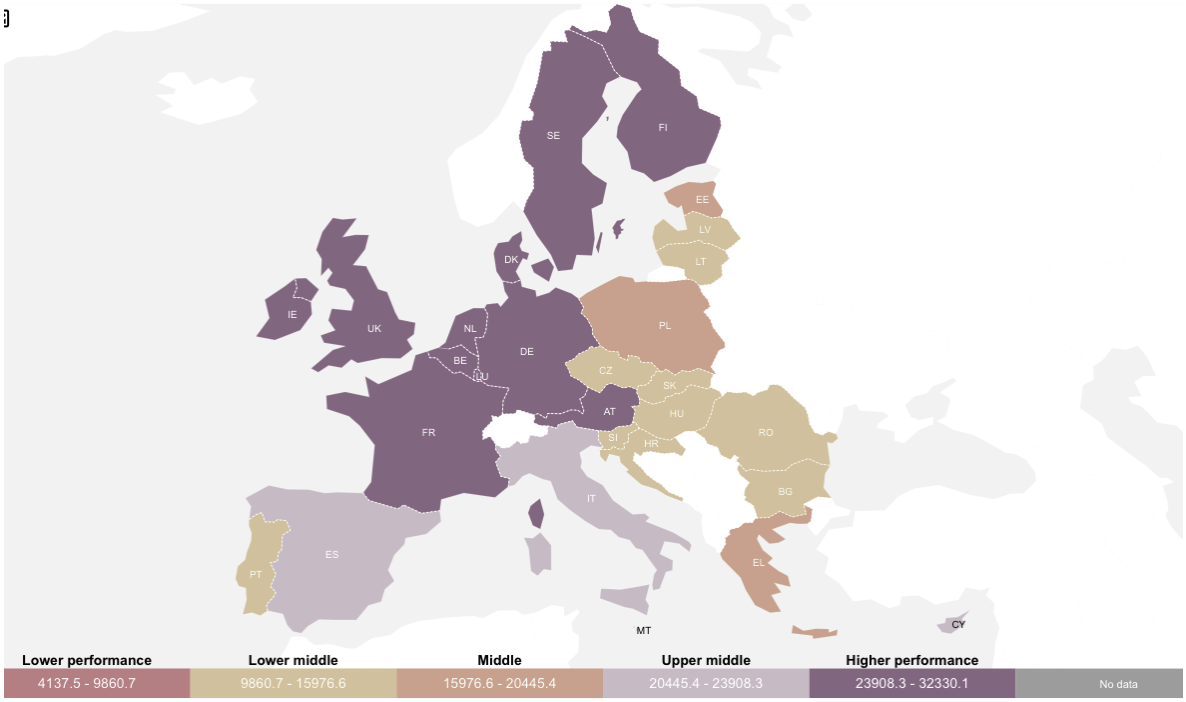

Figure 6: A comparison of purchasing power standards of median wages in EU states indicates a low wage level in Czechia. *2016 data (Source: Social Scoreboard 2020).*

When we look at the comparison of purchasing power parity, we can read it as a reflection of the differences between post-communist states and the rest of the EU—the unfulfilled promise of 'living like the Westerners', which accession to the European Union was supposed to deliver. People feel these differences keenly in their everyday lives, especially those in the economically weaker border regions of Czechia, where quality of life differs even more starkly. But it is also important to acknowledge that these differences do not strictly follow the line of (post-communist) East versus West. Especially since the 2008 financial crisis, the differences between economic centres and more peripheral states in the global market, such as Greece or Portugal, have become more apparent. Similar processes of European peripheralisation can look very different[53] but, in general, they mean the deterioration of working conditions. Czechia is unique in its combination of a high employment

[53] With a certain degree of generalisation, we may say that Czechia typically has a relatively high share of employees working full-time in comparison to other 'peripheral' countries where demands for more flexibility and lower labour costs resulted primarily in an increased rate of atypical contracts. This led to higher rates of income uncertainty, inequality and unemployment, especially for young people.

rate and low wages. And it is here that the dark side of data showing low rates of poverty and inequality comes to light. Whereas most people in Czechia have jobs and often work under challenging conditions, many are not economically stable because their incomes do not provide a decent standard of living and housing. A person who cannot cover household expenses from what they earn through employment is considered to be experiencing "in-work poverty" (Crettaz 2013). In recent years, this issue has drawn more attention, even in Czechia, as another criterion for measuring social situations. However, the basic mode of measurement replicates the limitations described above.[54]

The most apparent consequence of low wages is that households cannot save or maintain an emergency fund. In 2016, over a third of Czech households were unable to cover an unexpected expense of around ten thousand crowns. In the Ústecký region in Northern Bohemia, it was almost half of all households (ČSÚ 2017). A similar number of people are unable to save for a week-long holiday. The numbers are currently (2019) low in contrast to the 2008 financial crisis when the percentage had risen. Almost half of all households at that time did not have enough savings to replace a broken washing machine (ČSÚ 2020, 2013). As the dominant focus lies in tracking poverty (utilising the indicators we described above) and unemployment, there is a lack of more extensive analyses which would capture the experience of this economic uncertainty. One of the few exceptions is recent research on social classes conducted for iRozhlas, which revealed that, in 2019, low wages and economic uncertainty affected over 40% of households. This corresponds with the calculation of a decent wage published in the same year, which shows that half of all employees struggled to cover basic living expenses with their wages[55]. The consequences of low wages are mitigated in practice as people share incomes in one household, hold more than one job or have low costs associated with housing.

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[54] The problem with the basic mode of measuring 'working poverty' in Czechia is that it usually uses the indicator of income poverty (the number of economically active households which do not reach 60% of the median equalised household income). Therefore, it replicates the overall low-wage level, and its informative value is lower.

[55] Minimum decent wage is renumeration for standard working hours, which provides workers and their households adequate financial means to live a life that is perceived by the majority of society as meeting the basic standard. With such a wage, people should be able to cover expenses for food and housing, clothing, transportation, health care, education, and leisure activities, but also be able to pay for other important expenses, including savings for unexpected circumstances

Nevertheless, the numbers again indicate that a large segment of the population lives in economic uncertainty.

Adverse social situations are usually more associated with regions on the economic periphery—(post-)industrial border regions historically known as the Sudetenland—but even households in economically stronger regions and larger cities are vulnerable due to low wages. The cost of living and housing, in particular, is higher and jobs which do not require high qualifications especially fail to reflect the difference in wages (Holý 2018). These groups are however not visible in poverty statistics which compare incomes against the country's average. They instead manifest in surveys measuring subjective perceptions of poverty; for example, Prague tends to score lower in these than in many other regions (Večerník, Mysíková 2015). As housing costs rise, seniors in larger cities become particularly vulnerable. Czechia has one of the largest pay gaps in Europe, which puts older women at higher risk of poverty (Vidovićová et al. 2015), along with single parents who tend to be women. A third of single parents (or half, according to some surveys) have incomes which fall below the income poverty line as compared to one-tenth of the total population (Korychová 2018).

Other factors affecting the economic situation of many households are debt and distraint, which statistics on poverty do not take into account. One-tenth of Czech households are facing debt enforcement (income and property seizure); this level varies greatly by region and, in some larger cities, the number climbs to one in five people (Mapa exekucí 2018). Awareness has grown in recent years about the scope of over-indebtedness. However, debates on poverty still pay minimal attention to its impact on a household's social and economic standing. Statistics capture people's incomes before 'debt deduction'. After these deductions from wages or other forms of income, the debtor is left with a monthly minimum that cannot be seized and which has historically been lower than the minimum monthly social benefits (Trlifajová, Fejfar, Pospíšil 2018). According to a recent analysis by Median (2018), once deductions from income are considered, three out of four households facing distraint fall within the category of income poverty.

In light of these data, we may conclude that a third of the population, and in some regions, half, are in various ways living in an economically uncertain situation. It may

not necessarily be poverty in the sense of being unable to cover the most basic expenses. However, what is important is a long-lasting feeling of uncertainty, the consequent stress and the negative effects it causes.[56] Comparative poverty statistics do not capture the experience of this segment of the population. Until recently, their situation had mainly gone undiscussed in the public and political spheres, apart from a few news stories. The frequently 127urpriseed reactions to a series of reports and documents titled *Hranice Práce* (Saša Uhlová and Apolena Rychlíková) serve as a good illustration of this.

Specific Experiences on the Economic Periphery

Despite unemployment remaining low, as the Czech economy became closely interconnected with the global market after 1989, the number of local job opportunities diminished. Their concentration in economic centres and their surroundings, such as Prague, Pilsen, Mladá Boleslav or Pardubice increased (Novák, Ouředníček 2011) while many industrial structures all but disappeared in other regions (Šluknov, Jeseník, Ostrava). As elsewhere in the world, a decline in job opportunities in manufacturing leads to a growth of job opportunities in the service sector, which are often bound to economic centres.

The most apparent result of this development is not only the growth of unemployment but also a greater risk of job loss. In the regions which have become an economic periphery, a large segment of the population has now had experience with being vulnerable to the economy's fluctuations. When measured in absolute numbers, the last financial crisis brought steeper job loss to areas with consistently high unemployment[57] followed by greater subsequent job growth. Though the current

[56] Households which live without an emergency fund, 'from paycheque to paycheque' for a long time, experience a higher degree of uncertainty, stress and mental illness (Rohde et al. 2016).

[57] Large areas in the Ústecký, Moravskoslezký and Karlovarský regions—regions most commonly associated with an adverse social and economic situation—are the most affected. Other regions are also impacted though, such as Broumovsko, Jesenico, Frýdlantsko, and a part of south Moravia and inland peripheral areas, in other words, inland areas which are harder to access, commonly on the borders of regions, such as the area around Slaný, Žlutice, or Příbram. It also must be said that there are significant differences within these regions.

(2019) rate of unemployment is rather low, a large percentage of people have experienced unemployment—in these regions, it is one in five households, and in some towns, it is one in three[58]. Income data tend to be only available at the regional level. The differences between regions are not as stark, as the higher wages in economic centres balance out the lower-earning areas. Data from 2014 show that a closer look into the regions reveals that the differences in wages between the economically strong areas and the periphery may be more than 25% (Bernard, Šimon 2017). This uncertain job stability amplifies the uncertainty people feel due to the low wages and lack of savings. These regions also experience higher rates of indebtedness and distraint. Rather than those areas with the current highest unemployment (2019), distraint is most common in areas where unemployment hit its peak around 2010 (Map of unemployment, 2020).

In combination with lower education levels, the decline in job opportunities has led to new standards around employment in many regions, such as long commutes. People have also had to adjust to the demands of high work efficiency, which includes shift work and overtime. In 2016, over a third of Czech employees did shift work, one of the largest percentages in the European Union. When compared to Prague, shift work is twice as common in the Ústecký region (almost 40%; Petráňová 2017). In regions which are now on the economic periphery, long commutes are more frequent, a significant expense, especially for those working in jobs requiring lower qualifications (Temelová et al. 2011, Tonev 2013). Commutes and shift work have a significant impact on how households operate. Qualitative research indicates that in economically peripheral regions, precarious and unstable forms of employment are on the rise. These involve “agreements on work” performed outside the employment contract’, agency work or cases of ‘false self-employment’. Research also shows the impact that physically challenging work has on health (Mikešová 2018, Trlifajová et al. 2015). Moreover, the combination of low wages and limitations around commuting time and distance have an especially adverse effect on women (Temelová et al. 2011, Decker 2019).

[58] The calculations were made on the basis of unemployment data which measures the unemployment rate as a percentage of all residents aged 15 to 65 (regardless of whether they can be employed).

As job opportunities decline and drop in quality, people start to leave places which become the economic periphery (Novák, Netrdová 2011). This trend continued even during the economic growth of the last decade: some towns in northern Moravia lost over ten per cent of their permanent residents in the previous ten years alone (see pic. below). The more likely to leave are the well-educated or young people who go to study in other towns. The less educated find it more challenging to relocate due to the rising costs of rents—staying and living in the homes they own make it possible for them to compensate for low wages.[59] Moving would also pose a significant risk to people under distraint due to the meagre income left after debt deductions. They also depend on the personal ties they have to informal economic systems.

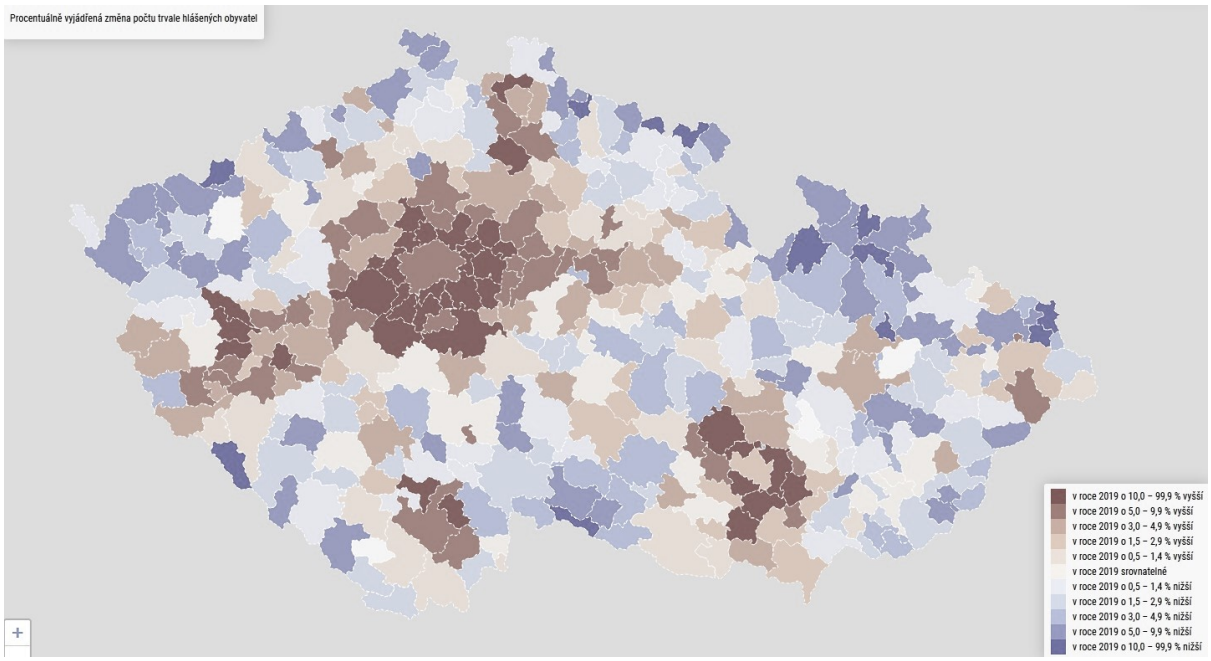

Figure 7: Numbers of permanent residents in Czech municipalities, *percentage difference between 2008 and 2019 (Source: Mapa nezaměstnanosti 2020)*

[59] As previously mentioned, wages of low-skilled jobs in different regions are usually fairly similar and do not reflect the costs of living in economically stronger regions.

The change in social structure and loss of cultural capital characteristic of depopulation (Ouředníček, Špačková, Feřtrová 2011) has led, in the post-1989 period, to a visible deterioration of both private and public buildings as well as public spaces. This decline is especially apparent in places which experienced an economic boom and an influx of new residents and investments after World War II, mainly thanks to the development of heavy industries. The worsening conditions of buildings and public spaces are strongly felt as an accompanying phenomenon symbolising the complete overhaul of the social and economic structure.

The poor condition of public spaces is just one among many manifestations of the overall decay in public infrastructure and degraded accessibility of services which more peripheral places started experiencing after 1989 (Temelová et al., 2011), including school quality and, especially, the quality and accessibility of healthcare (due to the complete or partial closures of hospitals, a shortage of doctors, etc.). The quality of public spaces has increased in recent years thanks to European funds, economic prosperity and an increasing number of local activities. However, infrastructure is not improving despite economic growth. Some areas even see more intense conflicts around its accessibility and quality—the hospital in Rumburk serves as the most prominent recent example (see, for example, Rychlíková 2020).

This development has a substantial impact on the experience of locals. In public and political debates, media depictions continue to reinforce and uphold this image of the Sudetenland, which has come to symbolise the economically peripheral regions (Władyniak 2018). This image is problematic as it amplifies stigmatisation and contributes to a reduction of complexity in public debates on these economically peripheral regions. Instead of exploring the many factors which contribute to this situation, the subject under discussion is the mentality of the Sudeten people and their associated loss of cultural and social capital.

Figure 8: A picture from the Sudetenland series *by Jaroslav Kučera, reprinted in Hospodářské noviny, can serve as an illustration of how economically peripheral regions often are portrayed. (Source: Hospodářské noviny 2016)*

Roma Presence as a Symbol of Change

Often, the locations most significantly affected by these changes—a drop in the number and quality of job opportunities, social structure change, declines in the public space and infrastructure conditions, an overall drop in living conditions and the loss of regional status—also see the most frequent protests against the Roma. In many cases, these places used to be economic centres until 1989, such as the industrial zones of northern Bohemia (and Moravia), where extensive housing estates grew to accommodate those working in the mining industry. In some places, the decline began in 1945, but thanks to state policies, local industrial zones continued to operate (for example, the Šluknov region or the Broumov region). After 1989, however, steep drops in job opportunities generally came in waves (partially depending on the specifics of the region and its expert/industry specialisations).

One of the accompanying effects of this trend is that housing is rapidly becoming vacant, especially housing estates built around industrial zones. There are no data

providing a comprehensive description of this housing exodus, nor the subsequent arrival of the low-income population, especially low-income Roma, who moved into the vacant houses. In many cases, Roma had already lived there prior to 1989—they were often labourers who arrived after the war or, in several subsequent waves, moved from Slovakia. Nevertheless, case studies conducted in individual towns show that the growth of the Roma population in peripheral (post-)industrial towns and their residential (and often social) segregation happened at the beginning of the 1990s and the turn of the new century. In this period, housing was being renovated and privatised, and the cost of living in the town centres was growing: Prague, Český Klumlov, Mladá Boleslav and Louny all had unmaintained historical neighbourhoods with some Roma residents. The Roma residents often did not have sufficient finances or did not fulfil the (often selective) requirements necessary to buy their flats. They also did not have access to alternative financially accessible housing in their original place of residence (Baršová 2002, Mikulec, Ripka, Snopek 2016). In the absence of social housing, vacant houses in those cities experiencing economic decline and depopulation became the only option, sometimes due to the (new) homeowners and sometimes due to a lack of alternatives or the absence of familial support.

In this way, cities which were better off economically took a part of their population which was experiencing the downside of this rapid change in the social order and removed them to economic peripheries which lacked the knowledge and capacity to offer support or solutions. These relocations significantly contributed to making the most distinct effects of economic change invisible in more prosperous cities (or areas). By relocating this part of the population to places considered peripheral, it also became possible to minimise their difficulties as being caused by the conditions in these places. The local problems of these places are also often attributed to the loss of human capital due to the expulsion of the German people, from the country after the Second World War (see, for example, Boček, Cibulka 2016).

Places which were unattractive to tenants and cheap to purchase became places to do business with those who did not have many other options for finding housing. Many years later, this process was dubbed the ‘poverty industry’ in the media. However, the concentration of Roma people in certain parts of the towns was also often tied to the policies of local governments, which purposely only assigned

housing to them in specific parts of towns (Duchcov, Litvínov, Varnsdorf, Děčín etc.). The key factor here was the privatisation of company-provided flats (see, for example, Tošner 2010). The ongoing privatisation[60] led to most municipalities losing a principal method of controlling the composition of their populations and their concentration in certain places (Mikulec, Ripka, Snopek 2016). The isolation of the Roma in certain areas meanwhile was often accompanied by growing segregation in schools (Cashman 2017), jobs and leisure activities. As personal contact in towns dropped, relations grew even tenser.

People in uncertain social and economic situations (low wages, at risk of debt, job loss, etc.) thus found themselves in regions with a lack of job opportunities and public services with limited capacities. When disadvantaged groups concentrate in adverse environments, their problems multiply. They deal with the inaccessibility of legal, stable income, a low success rate in the education system, over-indebtedness, unstable housing, addiction, and a resulting increase in tensions, psychological problems, and conflicts. In the dominant narrative, these problems were often ethnicised, and the cause was attributed to the character of the Roma people. Instead of offering support measures or social support, municipalities often ignore their problems, respond to them with an effort to displace them or use repressive measures. This approach exacerbated the social problems further.

In some areas, Roma people concentrate in individual houses. In the formerly industrial centres, however, it is blocks or neighbourhoods. The factors we described above amplify the stigmatisation of quarters with a higher rate of Roma population. Other residents stop frequenting these parts of town, which contributes to (often exaggerated) notions about these areas being ‘ghettos’. This leads to further deterioration of the situation. People start relocating, not just non-Roma, whose experience often draws the most attention, but everyone who can, meaning people in better social situations. The stark differences in age further amplify conflicts and feelings of jeopardy. Most people who stay in housing estates tend to be retired or close to retirement age (and often non-Roma), whereas new arrivals are most

[60] From 1991 to 2010, around 80 per cents of flats formerly owned by the state and transferred to municipalities were sold, and the rate of public housing fell to 10 per cent (Mikulec, Ripka, Snopek 2016).

frequently young (Roma) families with children, which causes conflicts on its own. The whole process has a strong economic effect, and the drop in real estate prices further magnifies the stigmatisation of these areas. While the new arrivals are primarily tenants, some long-term residents are homeowners. Purchasing their flats was often a lifetime investment for them. The experience of people in these areas is often discussed in the media and in municipal politics using terms such as 'feeling safe' and prioritising the experiences of non-Roma residents. The 'less fortunate', the Roma, and their arrival are considered the cause of the problem (see, for example, Chval 2018, Svoboda, Zilcher, 2018). The feeling of jeopardy, which stems from safety concerns and the stigma connected to the area, is often experienced by all residents, regardless of ethnicity (Hurrle et al. 2018, Wallach 2018).

This high sensitivity to the presence of Roma people, of course, does not stem only from feelings of jeopardy linked to the change in the place they reside. The visible presence of the Roma can become a symbol of the significantly more extensive change from an industrial centre to an economic periphery and thus serve as a lightning rod for people's frustrations with the impacts of this development, over which they have barely any influence. As we explored in detail in the municipalities of Duchov and Litvínov (Trlifajová et al. 2015), there were an array of factors which led to the decrease in job opportunities, the loss of municipal control over housing, depopulation, property price depreciation and the visible deterioration of public spaces and infrastructure. However, in public debates and politics, these problems were easily (and often deliberately) reduced to the increase of Roma population and the impact of actions ascribed to them. The Roma presence thus became a visible manifestation of the deterioration of the living conditions, the decline of the towns and the loss of control people felt over a place in which they have lived their whole lives.

We can observe a similar development in many other places: the relocation or the arrival[61] of Roma was often one of the key factors in triggering conflict,

[61] Studies conducted in those areas revealed that in recent years, people mostly move among individual municipalities in the region, often prompted by unstable housing situations, poor housing quality, debt, fear of having their children taken away or the specific targeted policies of some municipalities. However, even a small group of people might rouse feelings of jeopardy. Regardless,

demonstrations against the Roma and changes in municipal policies (see, for example, Kafková et al. 2012, Kaiserová, Matoušek 2015). Before the series of demonstrations against the Roma people started in northern Bohemia in 2011 (see picture bellow), the Šluknov mayors had written a letter which serves as a good illustration of this phenomenon. They spoke about the problems plaguing the regions, such as the inaccessibility of work, brain drain, and the lower quality of education or healthcare. However, the solution they demanded was to control the

news of 'floods' of people continues to this day, sometimes taking on forms that approach urban legends, such as the story of quiet night buses secretly transporting Roma from Slovakia.

presence of 'the unadaptable', a term which came to be synonymous with the Roma in many places (Hejnal 2012, Malík 2011).

Concern over the growth of the Roma population and their visible presence reflects real feelings of jeopardy and uncertainty experienced by a broad spectrum of residents and amplified in economically peripheral regions. The misplaced allocations of blame for the situation are often artificially created by local politicians

Šluknov, 30 May 2011

Dear Prime Minister,

We turn to you with an urgent plea for help in dealing with the lack of security in the cities and municipalities of Šluknov Hook. We ask you to visit this region personally and meet with representatives of the local authorities.

Allow us to briefly describe the current situation in the region [...] Unemployment approaches 22%, and there are no prospects for improvement in sight. The educational level of the population is very low. The young, the educated, and the qualified leave. [...] Some time ago, the first Senator of the Parliament of the Czech Republic for the Děčín district likened the Hook to Nagorno-Karabakh [...]

In recent months, the cities and municipalities of Šluknov Hook have seen a ***disturbing influx of unadaptable citizens*** from Teplice, Most and surrounding areas as well as other larger towns of the Ústecký region and Slovakia. It is undeniable that this is an organised exodus financed by a third party. [...] The Šlukon region is currently unable to offer good living conditions for its current residents, let alone thousands of new unadaptable residents. We do not have enough schools, kindergartens, teachers, primary care physicians and job opportunities, and in connection with the transfer of the social services agenda under the Labour Office, the work of social workers with socially disadvantaged families is no longer viable. Unorganised migrant ghettos are growing [...] crime is also on the rise; in Šlukonov, it grew by 200%. We expect the **future with them will be more than just complicated and dangerous for the current residents.** Understandably, **unrest and fear among the current residents are growing** and could easily escalate into an open expression of bigotry which may be racially motivated. [...]

The region is facing a security and social crisis. If it is not dealt with quickly and effectively, it will grow into a problem not just for this region but for Czechia as a whole [...]

Figure 9: Extracts from a letter to the Prime Minister written by mayors from Šluknov regions describing the complex problems in the regions, identifying the migration of the Roma as the main problem. *Shortened, bold added. Source: Zdroj: Sdružení pro rozvoj Šluknovska (2011)*

as distractions from their problematic behaviour or corruption cases (Trlifajová et al. 2015, Růžička, Lupták 2013). During the height of the 2008 financial crisis, anti-Romani rhetoric became a part of the discourse among people beyond those on the extreme right. Local politicians and local (non-Roma) residents started to use this

rhetoric, and it was commonly accepted by the media (Kluknavská, Zagibová 2011, Křížková 2013).

It is possible to draw parallels with other countries, where the sense of insecurity is associated with more general trends of transformation across societies. In particular, the social and economic impact of these changes, in combination with the limits placed on social protection instruments, creates a demand for control over most marginalised groups, whose very presence (and the areas in which they concentrate) is seen as a threat (Fassin 2013). In other words, the demand for policing the presence, movements and behaviours of Roma or other groups, often also minorities, is not an appeal to solve the immediate feeling of threat experienced during everyday contact. It is a call for more control over the social and economic developments in these towns.

The most well-known responses to this demand are called ‘zero tolerance’ policies and harsh punishments for petty crime (mostly) committed by impoverished minorities (concentrated in one place), which we encounter in a specific Czech context as well. Whereas in Western countries, repressive police forces play a significant role (Fassin 2013, Wacquant 2009), in Czechia, the repressive forces are closely linked to the social services system (Trlifajová et al. 2015). As is often discussed by local politicians, it is considered impossible to penalise or fine the Roma financially (due to the high rate of unemployment and indebtedness). The municipalities thus aim to achieve more control by implementing stricter criteria and applying more scrutiny when providing social benefits (Gajdoš 2010). This results in harsher practices at a local level, often tied to closer cooperation between the social services departments and the police (Ústecký region 2013). However, these local practices have a significant influence on national-level politics. The most prominent example in recent years are known as ‘benefits-free zones’, which gave municipalities the right to cut a part of people’s housing benefits with the expectation that it would ‘prevent the arrival of the unadaptables’ (Opavský deník 2019) and ‘restore order’ (iRozhlas 2019a). These remain in force despite having only a negative impact on the life of low-income people (Gruber 2020). Another change in legislation currently (2020/2021) being discussed would make it possible for

municipalities to seize social benefits from debtors regardless of the minimum amount needed for survival.

The goal of these controls over social security benefits is not to change people's situations or to discipline them into becoming 'productive' workers but to make them invisible in the public space, to prevent them from moving into the local area or to push them out.

Ethnicised Poverty and the Stigma of a Welfare State

The observed connection between changes in a residential local and the presence of Roma is just one factor contributing to the frustration stemming from economic and social uncertainty, manifesting in anti-Roma sentiment and measures. The minority is also seen as receiving an unfair amount of attention and support from the state.

As mentioned in the introduction to this text, due to the way poverty is discussed, the topics of poverty and, more generally, economic uncertainty are marginalised in the public discourse. This does not mean they are entirely absent from public and political debates. The experiences of social and economic uncertainty are examined through the concept of social exclusion, which offers a specific idea of poverty, connecting it closely to the Roma as poor, unemployed, and benefit recipients.

Connecting social service systems to the idea of 'undeserving' Roma recipients significantly contributes to the delegitimisation of those systems (Rat 2009). For many structural reasons and due to the long history of discrimination, Roma people are disproportionally represented among the unemployed and those with low incomes who apply for social benefits (World bank 2008). Though unemployment, poverty or unstable housing are not solely and, on many levels, not primarily specific to the Roma population (Prokop 2009), the perception of the Roma as a prioritised recipient of benefits is often encouraged by the media and by some political representatives. On the local level, and often on the national level, long-held stereotypes which paint the Roma as incompetent and which talk of their 'unwillingness to work' and 'unadaptability', became linked to persistent unemployment or the collection of social benefits. The concepts of poverty,

unemployment and social exclusion were connected to the perception of the Roma as problematic ‘nomads’ who ‘are repelled by work’ and ‘cannot adapt’. This perception has existed since the beginning of Czechoslovakia as a state, and it continued throughout the First Republic and communist periods (van Baar 2012, Spurný 2011, Donert 2017).

However, this stereotypical perception of the Roma was further amplified by state policies focusing on preventing social exclusion, which replaced the fight against poverty in public policies. In 2004, socially excluded areas were mapped for the first time. Shortly after, the Agency for Social Exclusion (originally called the Agency for Social Exclusion in Roma Localities) was established[62]. It was aimed primarily at municipalities with a higher concentration of Roma or low-income populations. The Agency for Social Inclusion was the only institution in the public administration that aimed to provide complex solutions to the problems of social disadvantages or poverty. Particularly in its early years, it also became very visible in the media and an important actor in debates about the benefits system, social housing, debt and the fight against unemployment—topics relevant to many beyond just those living in excluded areas. As the agency was so prominent in these discussions and as it was still perceived as an organisation supporting the Roma, it contributed to the ethnicisation of these problems. It also helped confirm the idea of the Roma as poor and as a group prioritised by the government over other groups in uncertain situations.

We may therefore consider racism an explanation for the common criticism concerning the support systems provided to low-income people, especially the social benefit systems, which we often encounter in studies among employees of public institutions and municipalities in more peripheral regions (Trlifajová 2015). They often criticise the system for being ‘too generous’, ‘unjust’ and ‘demotivating’. However, when we attribute these opinions to racism, we then tend to overlook the real economic foundation they were based on. That leads us back to the problem of

[62] The agency dropped this part of its name during attempts to de-ethnicise the problem. Ethnic criteria were also omitted during the subsequent mapping in 2014 (GAC 2015), but the close association stayed in the public perception.

low-income levels. The social system (with the exception of tenant support) aims to protect people living in material deprivation. In recent years, there have also been significant cuts where low-income households are concerned. Moreover, many eligible households do not apply for benefits, whether this is because of the complicated and often humiliating bureaucratic process, specific conditions excluding some working households,[63] the stigma associated with asking for benefits or just a lack of knowledge about the system or low accessibility of information (Mareš 2001, Trlifajová 2015).

As a result, the percentage of people claiming benefits is in the single digits (in 2018, barely 2% of the population collected assistance for material need, and little over 4% received housing assistance). This is a fraction of the 30–40% of the population that lives with economic uncertainty. The social support system thus does not cover working people with low incomes, especially those facing distraint orders. Social services are also broader than one benefit: if one qualifies as eligible for benefits, more support becomes available, such as the possibility of asking for help with unexpected expenses, school materials for children, health care costs or school lunches. When considering the costs associated with jobs (commute, food), the income of a household whose members work low-earning jobs may be only a little higher than that of those who claim benefits and have no formal employment. If the household is in debt and their salaries are being seized, their overall income may even be lower (Trlifajová, Fejfar, Pospíšil 2018). All these factors contribute to the feeling of injustice that the state does not support those who are 'trying' and 'working'.

This results in a seemingly paradoxical situation. Only a small segment of the population in economically uncertain situations can get support, but this has not given rise to political pressure or demands to broaden the system. Several studies prove that if support services predominantly target the poorest groups only, they are often seen as less legitimate (Kumlin, Rohstein 2005). This is amplified further if they

[63] For example, the obligation to use your savings to cover costs if you want to claim material need assistance for over six months.

are linked to a specific ethnic group (Gilens 2009). The stigma attached to the image of benefit recipients as a problematic group abusing the support (van Baar 2012), together with the feeling that the system is unjust and does not target those who most need help, create demand not for a system that is more encompassing but, instead, that has more limits.

At the local level, this manifests in the escalation of monitoring activities with the cooperation of the police. These may involve targeted searches for possible 'abuse' of benefits or undeclared income—police are most visibly involved in inspecting casinos, forbidden sales of scrap metal or the ownership of cars and other property that might be considered excessive, etc. (Trlifajová et al. 2016). Once again, it is not a matter of local policies only, as these approaches impact changes in the allocation of social benefits to low-income households. In recent years, these systems (with the exception of a few cases) have lowered the real financial value of benefits for the most impoverished households and imposed stricter conditions and more scrutiny when applying.[64]

If we look at the figures involved in public and political debates in the regions most affected by economic uncertainty, they often support those trends or even initiate them (see, for example, 15 recent measures to tackle the poverty industry[65]). The feeling that the social benefits system is unjust leads to demands for more limits and stricter monitoring of benefit allocation.

Demands to Affirm the Status of 'Decent People' through Social Policies

The delegitimisation and stigmatisation of the social support system correspond with a shift in thinking about the support provided by social policies which occurred

[64] Absent or gradual valorisation, the cancellation of benefits targeting low-income households or the implementation of stricter conditions (social assistance, conditional increase in child benefits), broadening of punitive reductions (expanding the groups which have their benefits reduced to the subsistence minimum)

[65] Point (6). Revise the social benefits system: consider merging housing assistance and the housing supplement; capping benefit allocation according to price maps, ensuring the precise application of benefits; reducing the number of people sharing a household; and cutting, for example, lump sum payments for energy. Point (7). Introduce legislation allowing for data on the reception of social benefits and conducted social work to be given to municipalities

internationally at the end of the twentieth century. During this time, the idea that overly strong welfare states have demotivating and demoralising impacts and that they hamper growth and economic development began to dominate the debate on how to support impoverished and low-income groups. Even though these assumptions remain unproven to this day (Sjöberg, Palme, Carroll 2010), they have legitimised significant cuts in public policies, making conditions for applicants stricter and inspections of social benefits recipients more frequent. Although these debates originated in the Anglosphere, the emphasis on the effectiveness of the social system and cost-cutting measures, as well as the prioritisation of quick and flexible job market integration over solutions to (income distribution) inequalities, were mirrored to varying degrees in the social policies of most developed economies (Clasen, Clegg 2007, Bonoli, Natali, 2012) and international institutions (Jenson 2012).

The notion that the answer to social problems lies in employment started to take hold over the political and public debates. ‘Activation’ and securing employment became the goal of social policies and a way to legitimise them (Jenson 2012; for the Czech context, see, for example, Sirovátka T. et al. 2014). Low income and its consequences are stigmatised as personal failings caused by an inability to adapt to new situations, laziness or moral shortcomings. Social policies targeting these groups are not primarily steered by the idea of protection but by the concept of control and discipline (Wacquant 2009).

As a result, people with low or uncertain incomes do not want to be seen as poor because poverty is attached to the stigma of personal failure. This leads us to the third piece of the puzzle, which explains the tie between policies targeted against the Roma and the welfare state. There is a visible effort in low-income households to differentiate themselves from those who claim social benefits and to reject the label of ‘poor’ in general.

If we return to the protests we described at the beginning of this article, particularly those which took place during the height of the financial crisis between 2008 and 2014, the available data reveal that many of the protesters were unemployed or claimed benefits themselves (Janebová, R., Valová 2016). A clear distinction was crystalised during the debate about the sources of the problems. A distinction was made between ‘decent/normal citizens’, ‘decent Czech people’ and ‘the locals’ on

one side and ‘the unadaptable’, ‘the deadbeats’, ‘the Brown ones’ and ‘the migrants’ on the other (Kluknavská, Zagibová 2011). This verbal framing plays a key role in establishing or highlighting the line between who is seen as a community member, a citizen and an individual who should have rights and those who are not seen as valid members of society because they fail to meet expectations, disrupt the social order, do not work, etc. (cf. Anderson 2013).

This distinction significantly impacts the form of the (loudest) demands coming from cities in economically disadvantaged regions with a higher rate of Roma in the population. Apart from expressing feelings of jeopardy connected to the presence of Roma, which we described above, as well as a sense of injustice as regards state support systems (which they further reinforce), these demands want to confirm a social hierarchy and draw a line between non-Roma and Roma (see Slačálek 2014 for more details). This is despite the fact that the two groups both experience the same adverse effects from increasing uncertainty on the job market. It becomes apparent that state social support plays a key role here. In many places, the emphasis on tighter scrutiny we described above was amplified in connection to benefits, and the work of social services came to involve more inspections and enforcement of order. The visibility of this scrutiny matters as well, and, consequently, the media are often involved. Those who claim benefits (and do not deserve them)—the ‘unadaptable’ and ‘deadbeats’— are lumped together in one imaginary Roma group and separated from the rest of the residents. The Roma have little to say in this debate, which exacerbates the situation for them significantly (Křížková 2013).

As we previously described in detail in our examination of Litvínov and Duchcov (Trlifajová et al. 2016), in some locations, the re-engagement of municipalities in social policy allows for legitimacy to be regained and is met with political support, but only if their implementation shifts considerably. While, on the state level, the declared aim of social services is to change people’s situation and integrate them into the job market, the inspections we described above are mostly performative, visibly labelling ‘the unadaptable’—which also labels the rest of the population, regardless of their social standing, as ‘decent people’. A certain shift has occurred in the role of social politics, especially in regard to benefits for people in low-income

households. New elements in the benefits allocation system serve to define social standing and hierarchies, not to alleviate structural inequality.

Figure 10: Photo of the police conducting a check among social benefit recipients, published in media *with the caption: ''Yet more transgressors from Litvínov might lose their benefits; they came to claim them in their car.' The picture shows the increased activity of the municipality in acting against possible abuse of benefits and also confirms the image of the Roma as the benefit recipients who break the rules. (Source: iDnes 2010)*

Conclusion: From Social Protection to the Privatisation of Responsibility?

Economic uncertainty affects a large segment of the population. This does not increase the demand for more action to be taken by the state or for extending social protection— quite the contrary. As the tools to capture the experience of this segment of the population are absent, and as social policies only target the most impoverished and are associated with the Roma as their main beneficiaries, people instead demand social policies be harsher while attempting to distance themselves from those who use them. The large population segment in an economically uncertain situation is, consequently, even less visible, and the support available to them is minimised.

The slimmer social benefits system is no longer seen as providing social protection. The demand for fairness in social policies does not build on the idea of social peace

or the redistribution of wealth. Instead, it is expressed through increased scrutiny of those who are seen as undeserving of the support—in Czechia, the Roma—whom people distance themselves from. In the areas most affected by economic uncertainty, the connection between the social benefits system and the Roma community as their primary beneficiary leads to attempts to use those benefits to control their presence and behaviour—and often other processes which are frequently impossible for local authorities to influence and which contribute significantly to the concentration of Roma in the area. These attempts are often performative, conspicuous gestures or, sometimes, just pre-election rhetoric. But public visibility is important as it contributes to drawing a clear line between the Roma, as the recipients of benefits, and the rest of society.

In parallel to the welfare state growing weaker is the transfer of responsibility to individuals and their families. It is possible to observe a correlation between the withdrawal of the state and the growth in the importance of financial services, predominantly in the form of loans which are used to ensure the stability of households and which represent a solution in emergency situations. As a consequence, a large segment of the population grows more uncertain and vulnerable, as does the influence of private entities in the evaluation of the individual (Kear 2013). The ability of the individual, or the household, to negotiate and be perceived as creditworthy and solvent according to the criteria of the market becomes a key criterion in accessing housing, which is dominated by homeownership, via mortgages. Inequality and the marginalisation of those already disadvantaged thus continue to grow. In the worst cases, the absence of social protection leads people into debt traps. They may then lose their fundamental civil rights as people facing distraint have no guarantee their social rights will be respected, and their right to privacy is significantly disrupted. Consequently, their trust in the state and democracy is much lower (Median 2018).

Further social and economic inequality is not the only impact. A significant consequence has been the loss of tools which would allow people to talk about social inequality, economic uncertainty and their causes in a non-stigmatising way, leaving less space to share knowledge on how to mitigate the situation. An individual or household that cannot cover their living expenses on their own is considered primarily a personal failing. Because of the stigma connected to poverty, those

affected by low wages and uncertain income do not want to be seen as poor. Consequently, they do not have the option to express their opinion in public debates in a way which would allow them to keep their dignity. This is amplified in cases of debt enforcement (*exekuce*), which drastically limits the lives of almost 10% of the population. That people's debts have soared to non-repayable height is primarily a consequence of state policies (Hábl, Trlifajová 2021), and yet the dominant narrative in political and public debate is that of personal responsibility.

The absence of a legitimate name for the experience of such a large segment of the population facing an uncertain economic and social situation due to relatively recent changes in the economy contributes to the invisibility of their experiences, past and current. The story of the economic centres has become dominant, and the problems of poverty, uncertainty and low wages are only talked about publicly in connection with a small group of people. The causes of these experiences among poorly situated people also go unseen or unconsidered. This is a dangerous trend for Czechia. As we have seen in other countries, frustrations stemming from societal disregard, a loss of status or unsolved problems contribute to a loss of trust in democracy and the internal segmentation of society. It also leads to one of the key anti-establishment movements and a growing significance of polarising cultural identities offering people a sense of dignity.

3.3.3 ARTICLE: From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma

Lucie Trlifajová, Filip Pospíšil[66]

The text is in a review process in Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review.

Abstract:

The article examines how neoliberal reforms can pave the way to welfare racialization, turning a delegitimized minimum income scheme into a tool for racial hierarchy enforcement.

We follow the development of minimum income scheme legislation from 2014 to 2021, after a series of workfarist reforms reinforced the restrictive and controlling aspects of the system. The analysed period is characterized by greater involvement of politicians representing the poorest regions of the Czech Republic. This did not reverse the trend to restrict social policies, accelerating and strengthening it instead. However, the main goal is no longer labour market inclusion or economic efficiency but bolstering municipal power over Roma benefit recipients.

To understand these developments, we analysed parliamentary debates around amendments to the minimum income scheme. We approached these debates as an arena where the categories of deservingness, moral values and hierarchies in the society are being performed and contested.

We show how the imagination of “localities”—spatial concentrations of Roma welfare recipients—have become central to the debates. The existence of “localities” is framed as a threat to those who live in the neighbourhoods, “decent” working citizens facing increased criminality, public disorder and insecurity. The proponents of the legislation emphasized the inability of the state to protect these people.

These developments are embedded in the seemingly colourblind neoliberal categories of deservingness which intertwine easily with existing local racial

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hierarchies. This neoliberal construction thus serves as a vehicle to legitimize racial divisions while making it impossible to address structural causes.

Introduction

In recent decades, the influence of neoliberalism on social policy has created new categories of deservingness and entitlement. The neoliberal conviction that benefits do not alleviate poverty but change the behaviour of the poor has not only legitimized the retrenchment of welfare support, it has propagated the idea that the behaviour of the poor requires regulation and that the state must assume responsibility for assisting and monitoring them. Welfare systems are thus judged not only from the perspective of economic efficiency, measured through savings and the participation of beneficiaries in the labour market, but also a fear of moral hazard and panic about its alleged negative effects on society as a whole.

Thus, in spite of the increased level of insecurity on the labour market (Kallenberg, Vallas 2017), welfare systems have been gradually reduced in recent decades. Instead of targeting structural conditions, welfare is reduced to a safety net, a scheme of social benefits targeted at cases of (extreme) poverty (Missos 2021). Increased attention is given to the obligation of the poor to prove their "deservingness", individual effort, and willingness to accept work independently of its quality and pay. The reduced welfare systems are no longer primarily a vehicle of protection; rather, they have also become a tool for normalizing intensified labour market competition (Standing 2011, Greer 2016). Control through welfare systems and control through law enforcement bodies now complement each other (Wacquant 2011, Fassin 2013). These processes often enhance the image of the failing poor, particularly impacting negative stereotypes, and contribute to the criminalization of minorities (Gilens 1999, van Baar, Powell 2019).

These trends have also been described by a number of authors in the Czech context, their peak being associated with a "social reform" period in 2011/2012 (Sirovátka 2014, Mertl 2016). These changes led to a reduction of protective functions in the country's welfare system and to increasing stigmatization of its beneficiaries. The present text focuses on the period after this wave of changes, a period which—in contrast to previous years where changes in the social system had

been initiated mostly by central government—is characterized by greater involvement of politicians and other actors representing the poorest regions of the Czech Republic. In most cases, however, the involvement of these players did not reverse the restriction of social policies but rather accelerated and strengthened it.

The aim of the article is to understand the narratives that legitimize these changes in social systems. Based on an analysis of parliamentary debates on the minimum income scheme during the years 2014–2021, we show how these changes paved the way for a rapid racialization of welfare and turned the minimum income scheme into a (performative) tool of control over the Roma population.

Neoliberalism and the Czech Support System for Poor Households

The Czech system of supporting low-income households is built on two main principles: social assitance (*pomoc v hmotné nouzi*) and social support (*státní sociální podpora*). The first type of benefits was primarily intended to serve as temporary protection in crisis situations, when households were unable to cover basic living costs. Social support benefits were originally designed to support low-income households and families with children. As shown by Potůček (2004) or Saxonberg et al. (2013), both of these types of benefits have undergone a series of changes over time that have led to a reduction in the minimum safety net of liberal states.

In this text, we focus solely on social assistance, a minimum income scheme, which ostensibly provides a basic, constitutional social protection for all citizens. Social assistance underwent significant modification in 2007, after the new Material Distress Assistance Act (*zákon o pomoci v hmotné nouzi*; MDAA) entered into force, and then in 2011/2012, when the social system underwent another series of changes related to the onset of the “economic crisis”. The act was drafted under a left-wing government, with the later changes (2007–2013) taking place under a centre-right administration. These reforms were based on proposals originating at the national level and were closely linked to the national discourse of austerity and debt reduction, which were among the government’s priorities. In this respect, the government followed approaches and policies that dominated European political

debates at the time centred around the logic of austerity and the conditionality of social support (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017).

The 2007 act emphasized the “activation” of benefit recipients and was closely linked to employment policies. (Sirovátka 2014). Based on a series of expert analyses, the construction of benefits was aimed at strengthening financial incentives to work by ensuring that income from the benefit system be lower than the minimum wage (Trlifajová, Hurrle 2018). However, the premises of labour market efficiency and individualized activation were closely intertwined with the stigmatizing notion of welfare recipients as “work-avoiding” poor. This was particularly pronounced in the 2012 reforms. As Rakoczyová and Horáková (2014) show, the reforms were led by the idea of a morally and culturally failing welfare recipient who becomes dependent upon state support. The proclaimed intention of these policies was to integrate the individual into the labour market. In practice however this translated into a work requirement even for those claiming insurance-based benefits, compulsory appointments to prevent “illegal” work and so on. Though most of the measures from 2012 failed or were ruled unconstitutional (Sirovátka, 2016), punitive approaches to benefit recipients remained in the system (Grundelová 2021). In 2012, social assistance was transferred from municipalities to the national Labour Office, with a goal of closer coordination between benefit and employment policies—in reality, reducing the influence of municipalities on benefit payments.

Along with these developments regarding the social assistance legislation, changes were introduced to the state social support system (the abolition of the social supplement, the reduction of child allowances), which led to some low-income households with children now needing the minimum income scheme support (Horáková et al 2013; Průša et al 2013). Minimum wage also stagnated between 2006 and 2013. By the end of the 2010s, 30–40% of households were in an economically insecure situation; however, less than 5% of households received housing benefits under state social support, and less than 1.5% received benefits under social assistance (Trlifajová 2021). Claiming benefit support as unemployed had low legitimacy according to public opinion (Tuček 2015c).

From Central Government to Local Players

Following the series of reforms described above, a left-wing government took office in 2014, placing greater emphasis on raising the minimum wage as part of its policies. However, amendments to the social assistance benefits were mainly characterized by further cuts. Our analysis focused on amendments to the MDAA adopted between 2006 (when the act was introduced) and 2021, with significant impacts[67] on the content of the law[68]. Whereas prior to 2012 nearly all the significant changes were based on proposals prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs[69], and no MP-initiated proposals for changes (*pozměňovací návrhy*) were added to them, this practice of legislating changes considerably around 2013/2014. Table 1 below provides an overview of the amendments introduced between 2014–21.

As of 2014[70] the legislative changes were no longer based on the initiative of the central government. The two ministry proposals (2014, 2016) were presented as reflecting the demands of municipalities. Other adopted amendments came from groups of deputies, which had not been the case even for a single proposal before. These deputies were also active in debates around draft legislation, which they modified according to their own initiatives, introducing significant changes to the government's original proposals. The authors often presented themselves as representatives of poorer regions characterized by the presence of "socially excluded localities". They often had experience with local political branches or municipal policies from these regions. Their affiliation to political parties varied from

[67] Smaller changes related to amendments to other acts, minor terminology changes and so on were not included.

[68] The lists of amendments (objective, key measures, authors, MP initiatives) were prepared using the servers zakonyprolidi.cz and segit.cz, and the content analysis used documents from the website of the Chamber of Deputies. Analyses by Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (Průša et al 2013, Horáková et al 2013, Hora, Vyhlídal 2016), Institute for Social Inclusion/Institut pro sociální inkluzi (2022) and the Ombudsman's annual report (Ombudsman 2022) were used to verify the content.

[69] Two proposals from 2010 and 2014, both of which reacted to details in the previous changes, are exceptions.

[70] The only change introduced in 2013 was related to the failed social reform of the previous year.

centre-right (ODS[71], TOP09) or populist centre (ANO) to far right (Úsvit/SPD[72], Severočeši), communist (KSČM[73]) or Christian democrat (KDU[74]).

[71] Civic Democrats

[72] Freedom and Democracy

[73] Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

[74] Christian Democratic Union

Figure 11: Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–21)

The titles are based on the name under which an amendment became known in the public debate (abbreviated titles used in this text are in brackets)
Proclaimed objectives are based on the explanations of the proposition's authors provided during the debates or in the accompanying materials.
MP initiatives are not elaborated in cases where they introduced minor changes or technical details.

(Part 1)								
Title	***Original proposal***			***Main adopted MP initiatives***			***Date submitted--date adopted***	***Support for-against (abstain)***
	Author	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main (adopted) measures*	*Affiliation*	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main measures*		
252/2014 Sb. **Housing Assistance Reduction and Municipal Consent** (Municipal Consent)	MPSV (ČSSD [75])	Experience from praxis Increased benefit payments as a problem, benefit misuse High amount paid through benefit to landlords offering low quality housing	Standards of housing quality (as a condition of benefit payments) Stricter control of benefit payments, increased conditionality, changes in benefit calculations Lower cap on housing assistance payment outside flats (90%)	ODS	Tool for municipalities to control the presence of dormitories	Right of municipality to decide on housing assistance payments	2014-2014	89-13 (64)
				ČSSD	Protection of seniors living in summer houses	Possibility to pay full housing assistance to those living in recreation houses		
367/2016 Sb. **Renewal of Public Service** (Public Service)	Group of senators (ODS, Severo češi, KSČM)	Enhancing the "motivation" for employment Fight against welfare dependency, social exclusion	Renewal of "public service", semi-obligatory work for benefit recipients Reduction of benefits after 6 months of receiving them, increase conditional public service / labour market activity, small bonus for more hours of public service	ANO, ČSSD, TOP 09	Detail on benefit payment conditions (exclusion of voluntary work), exceptions (health), contributions to municipalities organizing public service, etc.		2014-2016	129-13 (16)

[75] Social democrats

(Part 2)

Title	***Original proposal***			***Main adopted MP initiatives***			***Date submitted-date adopted***	***Support for-against (abstain)***
	Author	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main (adopted) measures*	*Affiliation*	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main measures*		
098/2017 Sb. **No Housing Assistance Zones**	MPSV (ČSSD)	Administrative problems with the implementation of "municipal consent" Support municipalities, prevent the migration of the "social weakest" organized by landlords	Consultation with municipalities in the process of benefit payments Lower cap on housing assistance payment outside flats (80%)	ODS	Award municipalities the right to prevent the spatial concentration of benefit recipients Fight against business with poverty	Municipalities can declare "areas with an increased incidence of socially undesirable phenomena" *(bezdoplatkové zóny)*, in which new housing assistance benefits are not paid Further technical limits on housing assistance payments	2016-2017	127-0 (58)
				ANO	Benefit recipient should not be seen buying alcohol and cigarettes Prevent benefit misuse	People who have been receiving benefits for over 6 months receive up to 65% of the benefits in vouchers[76]		
				SPD	Problem of non-payment of services to house caretakers or partnership of houseowners	Possibility to send housing benefit directly, without the consent of recipient		

[76] Paper coupons used to restrict the types of goods that can be bought.

(Part 3)								
Title	***Original proposal***			***Main adopted MP initiatives***			***Date submitted-date adopted***	***Support for-against (abstain)***
	Author	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main (adopted) measures*	*Affiliation*	*Proclaimed objectives*	*Main measures*		
327/2021 Sb. Three Offences and Enough	Group of MPs (ODS)	Protection of people who are living in the neighbourhood of "excluded or complicated" localities Support municipalities, provide them with a tool	Possibility to seize fines from social assistance benefit payments tor repeated offences against public order, civic coexistence, low school attendance	ODS	Technical detail—type of fines, offences, evidence, sharing of information		2019-2021	112-23 (15)

Local Context—Anti-Roma Protests and Demand for Control over Roma

The following section analyses the justifications and motivation for the above-described changes. However, the analysis requires first a short description of the social and political context in which these measures were implemented.

The period under research is marked by local ethnic conflicts that drew national media and political attention to deindustrializing regions situated on the economic periphery of the Czech Republic after 1989. These regions have experienced a significant deterioration of labour availability and quality, a decline in infrastructure quality and the outflow of more educated groups of citizens in recent decades. Moreover, due to the prevalent dependence on employment in industry, the regions were more severely affected by the 2008 economic crisis. Starting in the 1990s, an increasing number of poor Roma were pushed out of economic centres to these regions thanks to vacant housing capacity. By the mid-2000s, these spatial concentrations of Roma (whether individual houses or entire neighbourhoods) had come to be referred to as "socially excluded localities" and were the target of specific state policies (Hurrle et al 2016).

From 2011 to 2014, at the peak of the economic crisis, anti-Roma demonstrations took place in many towns in these regions. Framing the situation in terms of reverse

racism (van Baar, Powell 2019), the protesters identified Roma as the cause of often complex problems in the region (Trlifajová 2021). In the discourse of the protest, a key distinction was made between “decent/normal citizens”, “decent Czechs” or “old residents” and “gypsies”, “inadaptables”, “idlers”, “brown Czechs” or “immigrants” (Kluknavská, Zagibová 2013, Hejnal 2012). Though protestors were often unemployed themselves, the idea of Roma as undeserving recipients of welfare benefits resonated strongly among them (Janebová and Valová 2015). The polarizing anti-Roma rhetoric, originally used mainly by far-right actors during the protests, was taken up by local politicians, local (non-Roma) residents and the media (Křížková 2013). Demonstrations and their media coverage on local as well as national levels reinforced historically anchored stereotypes about Roma—their “unwillingness to work”, “inadaptability” and “abuse of benefits”.

In this period, the spatial concentration of poor Roma was associated with business with poverty (*obchod s chudobou*). This notion starts to appear in the Czech space in the late 2000s, gradually becoming synonymous with the provision of housing for people receiving welfare benefits. Business with poverty has been associated with “parasitism” on the social system and “abuse” by disadvantaged groups through landlords for their own enrichment (Kupka et al.). As Kupka et al. (2012) show, the central person in this narrative, a victim that needs to be defended against the negative effects of business with poverty are “old residents”; “decent citizens”; “concerned”, “uninvolved observers of the localities” into which (Roma) welfare recipients are allegedly moving. Other groups, such as the actual recipients of the welfare benefits, are portrayed in a much more ambivalent manner.

Anti-Roma protests affected the perception of the welfare system. They strengthened the perceived link between the social benefit system and growth in the spatial concentration of Roma. This way of thinking was also reflected in the government’s programme statement at the time, pledging to “prevent business with poverty, which consists of renting out overpriced accommodation covered by social housing benefits" (Government of the Czech Republic 2014:37). This paved the way for amendments to the MDAA[77].

[77] The government’s programme statement also included a promise to introduce (never implemented) social housing legislation and strengthen social services.

Locally, anti-Roma protests were often followed by the intensification of already existing municipal anti-Roma policies (Trlifajová 2021). A number of Czech towns, especially post-industrial municipalities with a higher proportion of Roma inhabitants, introduced them under the banner of “zero tolerance” in the first decade of the twenty-first century. These policies drew on security policies introduced in the United States and other countries. However, they differed in the close cooperation of the security apparatus and the social services sector. Until 2012 (and the transfer of benefits payments to the Labour Office) there had been repeated attempts to use the social benefit payments as a tool of control through these policies (Trlifajová et al 2014). Many of the measures had a strongly performative character, demonstrating a city’s ability to control the movement and behaviour of the Roma. The experience as well narratives legitimizing these policies strongly resonate in the legislative proposals of the period under examination.

Methodology

In examining the interplay between neoliberal policies and the above-described local, racist discourses, we look at the parliamentary debates around the successful amendments to the MDAA for the 2014–19 period (listed in table 1). Each amendment was read and debated three times in parliament—in the case of the No Housing Assistance Zones amendment, the second and third readings were repeated.

The parliamentary debates here are approached as an arena where a policy narrative is being performed and contested. The creation of a narrative is a constitutive part of the policy process (Lowndes 2016) in which recent problems are addressed through storytelling, describing a particular version of the past whereby the causes and character of contemporary problems can be defined in addition to an imagination of future. These narratives offer a mode of knowing and therefore activate cognitive and moral resources so as to delineate what are the right things to do (Lowndes 2016). Narratives may be employed strategically to strengthen collective identity or unreflectively as a practice of collective boundaries (Polleta 2006).

Analysing policy narratives about social benefits can thus help us to understand the struggle to delimit the boundaries of membership and normative values in a society. While formal membership is crucial, modern states often portray themselves as communities of value, composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour—creating both the basis for protection of those that are perceived as deserving, as well as the demand for control, discipline or expulsion of groups or forms of behaviour perceived as a threat (Anderson 2013). These processes are particularly pronounced in the approach to social rights. Reading parliamentary debates, we have thus searched for the ways in which the problems and their causes are described, the proposed changes are legitimized and the categories of deservingness (and threats to society) used in this process.

We first identified the main narratives employed by those who proposed and supported the legislative changes. We focused particularly on those used repeatedly. Based on them, we identified several analytical categories of legitimization and explanation of the proposals and two main categories of deservingness. For each category we identified several keywords, such as “normal” “decent” for the “deserving” category. Consequently, we coded both the segments identified in the first reading as well as the segments identified through keywords using Atlas.ti software. This helped us to verify the identified narratives and their frequency and to further examine the context in which they are used. We used the same method to search for narratives identified as unrepresented in the first reading, such as economic efficiency or a rights-based approach, to verify their occurrence. Particular attention was given to counternarratives—the ways in which opposition to the proposed changes was framed. We coded and analysed these in separate analytical categories.

The findings are an outcome of these analyses, clustered into thematical groups. Unless mentioned otherwise, the quotations used in the following text have been selected because they represent a narrative that was repeatedly presented in the debates.

Findings

The first part of the analysis concentrates on the main narrative used to legitimize the analysed amendments (see table 1 for an overview) in the parliamentary debates. In the last subsection, we also examine the counternarrative.

Local Knowledge and "Practical Experience"

As described earlier, significant legislative changes in the analysed period usually did not come from the national level. This was mirrored in the construction of knowledge in the debates dealing with the proposals.

Analysed parliamentary debates were characterized by a lack of references to professional policy knowledge. The proponents of the legislative changes as well as those involved in the debates legitimized their opinion on the basis of experience from Czech municipalities. MPs were often referring to their (previous) political experience at the municipal level, visits to the "affected" municipalities and consultations with their representatives. Expert policy knowledge, international experience or (data-based) analyses were scarcely mentioned. The arguments of opponents meanwhile were dismissed for not having sufficient experience with the "localities".

Relevant knowledge and local experience were particularly ascribed to municipalities characterized by a spatial concentration of Roma. In most cases the Roma are not mentioned directly. Instead, their neighbourhoods are referred to as "ghettos (of inadaptables)" "(excluded/risky) localities" "concentration of ("those") people". These municipalities are usually located in a post-industrial or deindustrialized part of the Czech Republic where a higher level of general unemployment impacts a larger portion of the population. However, the relevance of local expertise is constructed predominantly on the basis of the existence of (Roma) "localities".

The exclusivity of local experience among political representatives from the municipalities with "localities" becomes more pronounced in the debates around the Three Offences and Enough amendment (2019–21). The inability to understand (and thus have relevance in the debate) was explicitly framed in terms of the different experiences of the centre and the periphery, ascribing a certain naiveté to the centre:

> *In Prague 7, you may have a few dozen homeless people, some drug addicts, but other than that,* ***forgive me for putting it this way, you are living in***

> ***paradise. We who are from northern Bohemia, from Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, northern Moravia, we have hundreds, thousands of these people****. How are you going to work with thousands of people who don't complete anything that they are supposed to, who do not work, who only receive benefits and laugh at decent people? (Kohoutek, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Experience-based, often emotional argumentation was employed by the majority of parliamentarians, whereas arguments concerning the lack of data-based evidence mentioned by the amendments' critics did not produce any reaction.

Socially Excluded Localities as a Core Problem

The legitimacy ascribed to "practical", "local" experience was closely linked to the definition of the problem. Despite coming from the country's poorest regions, the amendments' proponents did not consider poverty, unemployment or social exclusion a problem per se—the problem was the existence or growth in the number of socially excluded localities. The existence of these localities is described as interconnected with the social benefit system.

> ***The enormous social benefits*** *that the state pays to those entrepreneurs—they* ***are a paradise for the clientelist octopus running ghettos for the inadaptable*** *[…]. They buy houses for a penny, accommodate the inadaptable in them and collect a generous state subsidy, the so-called social housing assistance. (Havlová, SPD, Municipal Consent, 2014)*

This understanding, as illustrated in the quote above, was most pronounced in the debates around the Municipal Consent and No Housing Assistance Zones amendments (2014–17), which focused on the housing benefit within the social assistance (housing assistance/*doplatek na bydlení*). The discussants had linked the existence of "localities" to an under-regulated, "overgenerous" benefit system which contributes to the expansion of business with poverty. While several MPs acknowledged there might be more complex, structural processes behind the formation of the "localities", they still pushed for a harsher approach to social benefits as a universal solution:

> ***Certain things have happened throughout history;*** *residential houses […] were bought by owners who had no relation whatsoever to the municipality, and they were rented out to people who almost exclusively apply for benefits*

> *[…]. These houses were offered to be transferred to the municipalities sometime in the nineties. The municipality did not strive to acquire the buildings, but it is hard to blame anyone for that today or to punish the municipality for it […]. The solution must be found elsewhere. And the* ***state must ensure that the construction of social assistance benefits […] will prevent the formation of localities.*** *(Vilímec, ODS 2017, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2017)*

In the latter debates around the Three Offences and Enough amendment (2019–21), the link between welfare and business with poverty become less pronounced. Socially excluded localities are now described primarily as a problem of inhabitants profiting from an overgenerous welfare system. Compared to previous debates, the reasoning has become more racist, though still with concealed reference to Roma as "inadaptables" or "those people":

> ***The inadaptables have adapted to this kind humanistic approach […]*** *that the money belonging to those who go to work is being handed out to those who do not go to work. And they are terribly content with this situation, so the numbers are growing, and the streets are expanding. (Foldyna, ex-ČSSD/SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

The proponents of the new legislation further emphasized the inability of the municipalities to address the problem with existing tools:

> ***The most terrible feeling for me as a former mayor is the feeling of helplessness, of not knowing how to deal with the situation.*** *And I guarantee you, not for myself, but for everyone else I spoke to today, that everyone in those localities is doing the best they can, but when they run out of tools, any measure ceases to be effective. (Kalátová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Protecting Deserving Citizens

Throughout these debates, the existence of "localities" is primarily framed as a problem from the perspective of those who live inside the neighbourhoods, who are, according to descriptions, facing an increase in insecurity and criminality and a decline in housing prices and overall quality of life. Specific examples often refer to small neighbourhood conflicts (such as late-night noise) that considerably worsen the quality of life but often are not even minor offenses in the eyes of law.

Neighbours in these "localities" are often described as "citizens"[78], thus emphasizing their right to be protected, to make claims:

> *It is indeed a problem that is troubling the citizens [...]. The people living there are rightly critical […] t**here is a high crime rate, and the prices of the surrounding real estate are deteriorating**. This must be said. **The citizens are afraid to leave their children unattended. The place is in public disorder.** We have a chance to help them. (ODS, Stanjura, Municipal Consent, 2014)*

Repeatedly, the speeches emphasized the unfairness of state policies for people outside the "localities", referring to the inability to protect them:

> *It concerns families […] they are being disturbed at night, their belongings get lost and **they feel like they cannot get justice; they are faced with the helplessness of not knowing how to deal with it.** The worst thing this state can do is allow people to feel like there are those who go to work and try hard, pay for their garbage and everything that comes with living in a city or a town, **and then there is a second group of people** who live with the feeling that they have no commitments, **they don't have to do anything, and it is normal, and it is tolerated**. (Bartošek, KDU, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

As the quotation above demonstrates, the deservingness of protection was often based on employment ("going to work") and thus proper behaviour ("getting up in the morning"). While speakers occasionally admitted that some groups of the poor should have access to social protection (the elderly, single mothers, young working families with kids), those who are actually receiving the social benefits were constructed in a strong dichotomy to "proper"/"normal"/"decent" citizens. In a few cases the distinction becomes explicitly racist:

> *Something really should be done about this, because you don't realize what **we're igniting here in terms of hatred between white and black people, if I must put it this way. And this is where racism originates.** (Rutová, ANO, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2016)*

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[78] The term "citizens" was by some of the legislation's proponents used to refer to the Roma / inhabitants of localities, but with an ironic subtone. Similarly, the ironic use "our citizens" or "co-citizens" refers to the Roma.

The “undeserving” benefit recipients and the inhabitants of the “localities” were often treated as overlapping categories. The threat they represented was most vividly and emotionally pictured in the most recent debates on the Three Offences and Enough amendment:

> ***Those people are laughing in your face,*** *[…] they are laughing at the officials, the police; they are simply not afraid of anyone here any longer, and they are doing whatever they please. And this is where we need to show to society—the only thing that they listen to is if you take their money, whether you like it or not.* ***Until you touch their money, the benefits, those people are going to do what they want! That is the reality!*** *(Aulická, KSČM, Three Offences and Enough)*

The proponents of the amendments also emphasized the need to publicly demonstrate the support for those labelled “decent”:

> ***What about the rest of the decent people who live in those neighbourhoods? They have the right to have peace****, they have* ***the right to sleep*** *in peace, they have the right not to have their shoes stolen all the time, they have the right to ride a decent bus on public transport. […]* ***The law is about them; it gives the problematic people some sort of a stop sign****! (Fialová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough)*

The perspective of welfare recipients was nearly absent from the debates with the exception of one critic to the Three Offences and Enough debate in 2021—and even then, the experience was framed as that of a single mother, thus one could expect her to be perceived as more deserving of support. The perspective of the (Roma) inhabitants of the “localities” was never represented. Their social situation and its cause were rendered invisible.

Despite most of the debates on the Three Offences and Enough amendment having took place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the social impact of this was scarcely mentioned. No one speculated as to the possible role social assistance could play in protecting those impacted by the coronavirus.

Benefit System as a Tool of Control

The framing of socially excluded localities and the behaviour of their inhabitants as (a) an outcome of a poorly constructed social benefit system and (b) a threat to municipalities and their (deserving) inhabitants created an impression that greater

control over socially excluded localities could be achieved though the introduction of new restrictions to the benefit system. Many of these measures were balancing on the verge of constitutionality.

In the debates about the amendments aimed at housing benefits (Municipal Consent, No Housing Assistance Zones), most participants agreed that those financial profiting are primarily not benefit recipients themselves but private landlords. The propositions aimed to limit their "business" by limiting the housing benefits so that tenants, particularly in lower quality housing, could pay less for rent or eventually stop receiving support altogether—consequently depriving private landlords of the main income source.

There had been some debate as to which types of housing should be affected by these restrictions. However, the central debates on housing benefits were not about these conditions but about the demand of municipalities to have "adequate rights" to decide who can reside in a borough:

> ***The essence […] is the right of a municipality*** *[…] to identify the localities within its territory where further concentration of people with housing assistance could mean significant social impacts on the municipality's territory, and, eventually,* ***to recommend the maximum number of persons to whom housing assistance should be provided in that locality****. (Vilímec, ODS, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2016)*

The right of municipalities to take decisions over benefit payments was portrayed as a tool of control over its potential misuse:

> *It is indeed the mayor who has the best knowledge of the situation in their municipality […].* ***It should be in the mayor's interest to ensure that benefits are not abused in his/her town and that there are no problems in excluded areas.*** *(Havlová, Úsvit, Municipal Consent, 2014*)

The Three offences and Enough amendment was aimed at direct, performative control over the behaviour of welfare recipients through the introduction of the right to seize fines from social benefits (see table 1 for details). These measures were presented as a tool boosting the symbolic repressive power of the municipality:

> ***We need to give mayors, towns, municipalities some tools*** *to finally do something about it. We can't just keep waiting for something, shielding ourselves with human rights. And, in fact, the municipal police who are coming*

*in **are literally being ostracized, ridiculed, because they have no tools** to do anything. (Juchelka, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021*)

Several supporters of the measure linked it with a critique of allegedly overgenerous social benefits and ineffective, costly social work. The call for repressive measures was accompanied by an appeal for the suspension of various welfare tools and was more pronounced on the populist far right:

*If we keep giving them more and more subsidies, we will not educate them. **We need to find restrictive measures to force them to comply. I do not see any other way. And, I repeat, if we keep spoiling them, that is the road to hell.** (Holík, SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Others presented repression against welfare recipients as a measure to help make efficient existing tools, including social work. However, there was a general consensus that restrictions are the only way to discipline "those people" and teach them proper behaviour.

***Prevention is good, I agree with that, but unfortunately [...] we are talking about a group of people where prevention has completely failed.** And if prevention doesn't work, then restriction must come [...]. And I'm pleading on behalf of the Ústí region, let's approve this bill, let's pass it.(Fialová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

During the long hours, the debate on the Three Offences and Enough amendment became more heated and emotional. The proponents of the amendment openly warned of an imminent ethnic conflict between Roma (the supposed beneficiaries of existing generous policies) and the majority society (that is threatened by their behaviour).:

*When will it stop? The other group of people are totally outraged**. So, who's creating the tension in this society? We are**. The Roma don't come here to vote on the laws, we do it, like a bunch of thickheads. **We're giving away working people's money to those who don't work!** (Foldyna, ex-ČSSD/SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Two years after the introduction of the No Housing Assistance Zones amendment in 2017, the "zones" had been introduced in a hundred municipalities—in some cases, across whole municipal territories (Zieglerová 2019). By 2021 however, these had been ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. It is expected that once it

gets to Constitutional Court, a similar decision will outlaw the right of municipalities to seize social benefits to pay for fines—no such case though has been presented as of this writing.

Work Ethic Continuities

As previously mentioned, work ethic was emphasized in parliamentary debates as central to the character of those deserving protection. Conversely, people portrayed as undesirable were characterized as those who "do not lead normal lives", who "do not work". Yet, as described earlier, most of the amendments presented in the parliament since 2012 were not aimed at facilitating participation on the labour market but at controlling population movement and behaviour portrayed as having a negative impact on neighbourhoods.

Only one amendment was targeted at employment: the reintroduction of public service (2014). Proponents from a centre-right political party emphasized the maintenance of "labour habits" (*pracovní návyky*) and motivation to work. There was general consensus as to the importance of maintaining "labour habits", a continuity within workfarist reforms from 2006–2012.

However, for many MPs involved, the debate was constructed around the notion of the undeserving unemployed (Roma) and the deserving (low-wage) workers. Public service was not presented only as a tool for (labour market) inclusion but a performative act for the "deserving" majority:

> *We will support this so that our fellow citizens, who haven't worked for a long time, don't lose their work habits, and* ***the majority of society who work on a daily basis will see the state's endeavour to bring those citizens back into the workforce*** *and ensure that they do not live at the expense of others. (Vystrčil, ODS, Public Service, 2014)*

The controversy in the parliamentary debates arose around the amount of money granted for public service. Eventually, the more repressive/punishing version prevailed. Calls for higher rewards for public service within the benefit system was, by the majority of parliamentarians, perceived as support for those that do not deserve it. This stance was often most pronounced by those who presented themselves as representatives of the disadvantaged regions. One of the MPs described the situation as follows:

Say they are called the Novák family […]. They have three kids, ***they do not work even though they are fit for work, and they are receiving benefits*** *(…) which earns them approximately CZK 21,500. At present, they do not have to work, they do not have to participate in public service, they do not have to pay their debts because the benefits they are receiving from the state are not subject to seizure. They do not have to pay health insurance […]* ***they can devote their time to dishonest activities—thefts or frequent parties late at night****, continuing until the early hours of the morning […].*

The second family [...] lives on the earnings of both adult parents who have two children [...]. Their net income is CZK 25,200. [...] They ***have to get up in the morning, and therefore*** *[...]* ***there is no room for daily celebrations, dishonest activities*** *[...].* ***They have to pay their debts*** *as their wages are subject to possible seizure.* ***The parents are definitely good role models for their children, they show that it is normal to work and to take responsibility*** *for their own life and the life of the whole family [...].*

The difference in income between the two families is about four thousand*. With the other advantages of a family living on benefits [...] such as school supplies, school trips, etc., this difference is further reduced. (Pastuchová, ANO, Public service, 2014)*

Again, the quote demonstrates an understanding of employment as a source of "proper" behaviour. The speech also points to the problem of low wages, the difficult situation of indebted workers facing wage seizures, a lack of social support for low wage working households—a reality impacting a large portion of the population in many poor regions of the Czech Republic (see Trlifajová, Hurrle 2018 for more detailed analyses). However, the answers presented in the parliament to these problems are not proposals for adequate wages, debt relief or a more generous social system, but for the restriction of social benefits that would increase the difference between the income of employed people and those on social benefits.

Counternarrative

While the amendments introduced in 2014 did not produce many debates, the debates around areas with an increased incidence of socially undesirable phenomena (2016–17) and especially the Three Offences and Enough amendment (2019-2021) faced criticism, leading to hours of heated parliamentary debates. Opposition to the proposals (unsuccessful and small in number) came primarily from

centre-liberal parties (The Pirates and the liberal wing of KDU). The argumentation was in many aspects embedded in neoliberal discourse—emphasizing individualized support, approaching welfare as a minimal safety net targeted towards the poorest and maintaining a focus on social exclusion as a core problem.

One of the main arguments against the proposed restriction on housing benefit payments warned that the proposals did not provide any protection for those who would lose access to housing benefits or would have their benefit payments limited:

> *The consequence of the regulation will be that a significant number of people will lose their housing, because once the business with poverty stops paying, many people will stop doing it. And I think that's where* ***we need to move quickly and start planning and mapping out where we are going to put these people so that they don't end up on the street****. (Gabal, liberal wing of KDU, Municipal Consent, 2015)*

Some of those who opposed the Three Offences and Enough legislation argued from a similar position, claiming that the proposal ignores the possible negative impact / worsening of the situation for benefit recipients. Others emphasized that the law deprives people of a minimum income:

> *I am also aware of the catastrophic situation in the excluded localities [...]. The adoption of this law will worsen the situation rather than improve it, although I understand the reasons [...].* ***The idea that these people will not meet their basic life needs for a certain period of time is an illusion [...], and there are risks, such as higher criminality in those localities****. (Ferjenčík, Pirates, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

In some cases, the opponent emphasized lacking evaluations, particularly that the proposal does not take into account long-term costs—emphasizing thus not only the potential negative social impact but trying the criticize the proposal from the perspective of financial ineffectiveness.

> E*xperts are concerned that the proposal on the table may lead to more people in prisons […].* ***Very targeted and individual social work with a family costs between 5,000 and 7,000 a month. A prison sentence, as far as I am informed, costs CZK 1,900 per day. The disparity is obvious.*** *(Richterová 2021, Pirates, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Others argued that the measures would not be effective as they replicate existing sanctions. None of abovementioned arguments however were treated as relevant and addressed by to the proponents of the legislation.

The narrative of those opposing the restrictive measures mostly replicated the stereotypical description of excluded localities and presented the behaviour of its inhabitants / welfare recipients as the core problem. Proposed alternative solutions targeted (alleged) individual causes; individual social work and complex support was presented as the main solution:

> *But these are also the* ***people that need to be worked with and taken care of afterwards, because I don't think anyone here wants them to just be dying on the streets.*** *[…] First, jobs and infrastructure are necessary in order for an improvement to be possible, and then a change like this can be made. (Čižinský, liberal wing of KDU, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Further, in line with neoliberal understanding, they often stressed the importance of social inclusion through employment:

> *This law will not solve it, and neither will further tightening. What will solve it is better enforcement of what is valid and what makes sense,* ***just getting able-bodied people to work****. (Richterová 2021, Pirates, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

There were exceptions—attempts to shift the narrative from excluded localities and failing benefit recipients—but very few: in the debate on public service, only one Social Democrat MP (unsuccessfully) emphasized the structural context of the low-wage labour market:

> *How is it possible that it is more profitable to sit at home on welfare than to work? This is somebody's fault. It's the fault of the system that put it in place.* ***It's not the high welfare we should blame, it's the low wages.*** *(Kailová, ČSSD, Public Service, 2014)*

However, this perspective was absent in other parliamentary debates. As described in the part on work ethic above, structural problems that led to little difference between low wages and social benefits were framed as a problem caused by an overgenerous social system.

Similarly, a social rights perspective—as an alternative to a neoliberal focus on minimum protection for the poorest—was mostly absent. The critique from a rights-based perspective was present in a written position by the public defender of rights, but it was explicitly mentioned only by one MP:

> *Please don't vote for this act, […]* ***because of some theoretical minority that you have been presenting here as bad****; I don't think these people are bad, they just need society to help them, which is why* ***we cannot support legislation that could be applied to all,*** *in other areas, negatively affecting the rights of inhabitants. (Dolínek, ČSSD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)*

Conclusion

The financial crisis in the Czech Republic intensified neoliberal, workfarist reforms to the social protection system, consequently accelerating its delegitimization both on practical and symbolical levels. The article followed the development of a minimum income scheme legislation (social assistance benefits) following these reforms in the years 2014–21. This period is characterized by the increased involvement of actors representing poorer regions of the Czech Republic in the legislative process who supported the further restriction of social benefits.

Despite a certain continuity with the neoliberal reforms of the previous period, particularly in conditioning support and a disciplinary approach to work, the main goals of the adopted measures are no longer presented as inclusion on the labour market or improvement of economic efficiency. The adopted measures primarily aim to strengthen municipal power: in awarding the right to take decisions on the residence of benefit recipients (possibility limiting housing benefit payments on its territory) and providing tools to control the behaviour of welfare recipients (the right to seize fines for minor offences from minimum income scheme benefits). All of the approved measures further limited access to social benefits. Some of these measures are open to direct challenges as per their constitutionality—the right of a municipality to prohibit housing benefit payments on its territory was, for example, ruled unconstitutional four years after its introduction, and some legal experts expect a similar decision on the right of a municipality to seize fines from social benefits.

To understand these developments, we analysed parliamentary debates around successful amendments to the minimum income scheme. We approached these debates as an arena where a policy narrative about the causes, character and possible solutions to the problem is being performed and contested while simultaneously establishing categories of deservingness, moral values and hierarchies in the society.

The analysed debates are characterized by the retrenchment of policy expertise, scientific knowledge or (data-based) evidence. Relevance is ascribed to knowledge and experience coming from the municipal level, particularly from municipalities characterized by spatial concentrations of Roma, which are often situated in poorer, deindustrialized regions of the country. The existence of these “localities” and the behaviour of its inhabitants is at the core of all the debates. The existence of “localities” is primarily framed as a problem from the perspective of those who live in their surroundings, who are, according to the descriptions, facing increased insecurity and criminality as well as declines in house prices and overall quality of life.

“Localities” are presented as a result of the broken and overgenerous social benefit system. Benefit recipients and the inhabitants of the “localities” are often treated as overlapping categories. There is an underlining racial understanding that these people are Roma. At the core of the debates is a dichotomy between the image of the social benefit recipient / Roma inhabitant of a locality, portraited as a threat, and “decent” citizens, their neighbours, characterized by employment and hence proper behaviour. The proponents of the legislation emphasized the inability of the state to protect these “deserving”, working people (of the ethnic majority) while tolerating the behaviour of those (Roma) breaking the norms. The outcome of this framing is general support for measures that aim both to increase control over the presence and movement of benefit recipients as well as performative control of their behaviour. The social situation of welfare recipients and poor people—whether of Roma ethnicity or not—is rendered invisible; none of these people have a voice in the debates.

These developments are strongly embedded in the narratives of neoliberal reforms from the 2007–2012 period. We believe that these reforms paved the way for the rapid racialization of welfare that occurred in less than a decade. By focusing solely

on a small group of poor, unemployed inhabitants in the “localities” and by emphasizing individual responsibility and morality, these narratives shifted attention from the structural inequalities and causes of poverty. Neoliberal approaches present employment as a source and core feature of “proper” behaviour and deservingness, whereas a lack of work is linked to behaviour which threatens the rest of the society.

These narratives are further exploited in the researched period. As we documented in this article, seemingly colourblind neoliberal categories of deservingness intertwine easily with existing local racial hierarchies, confirming and strengthening the racialized distinctions. Thus, a delegitimized diminished social system is no longer understood as a tool of social protection for everyone but as one that can help to enforce racial hierarchies. The neoliberal construction of deservingness serves as a vehicle for the legitimization of racial divisions.

This logic is often replicated even by those who oppose the adoption of restrictive measures. While they argue for the existence of at least minimal protection (“no one should end up on the street”), they still support the role of welfare as a tool for individual improvement and labour market inclusion and confirm the stereotypical link between welfare recipients as Roma or inhabitants of “localities”. Such narratives make it impossible to address the structural context of the low-wage labour market and widespread economic insecurity affecting a larger proportion of inhabitants, particularly in the poorer deindustrialized regions.

4 CONCLUSION

If I had to say what I find most interesting of the things I have learned in the process of writing this thesis, it is the enormous difference between social protection and social citizenship. And I am not speaking about difference on the conceptual level (level of abstraction). What I want to emphasise is that social protection can be both a system of control, disciplination and exclusion – as well as a tool of inclusion and recognition. The crucial difference is that only in the second case it is a road to social citizenship, a full participation in the society.

The processes that I have examined in this thesis are processes of disappearance of social citizenship, a gradual change in the balance between consent and coercion in the social protection system, which delegitimized the position of the poor in the public debate, limiting not only access of the poor and low-income to income protection, but also depriving them of recognition and of an equal position in the society.

But to get to this point, I will first answer, one by one, the main questions of this thesis.

Why is the construction of the system of social protection distant from the experience of the poor?

Economic insecurity (inability to cover unexpected expenses, over-indebtedness, low-wages and insecure jobs) impacted in the past years between 30 and 40% of households living in the Czech Republic, most of them employed. The data on the level of precarisation in the Czech Republic are limited, but multiple smaller scale studies show, that it does not impact only the the poorest, but different groups of population, including people working on higher-skilled positions. However, as I have shown in chapter 3.2, the current Czech system of the social

protection of the poor and low-income households is covering only a fraction of inhabitants who are facing economic insecurity, mostly unemployed. Benefits targeted to low-income households within the social support scheme (housing support, child allowance) are received by less than five percent of households, for some types of benefits (social assistance) it is even only around one or two percent of Czech households. State-provided social protection is reduced to a system of "management of extreme poverty" (Missos 2021, Kourachanis 2020)

However, the focus of the first empirical part of this thesis was on the principles around which the system of social protection of the poor and low-income households is constructed. I examined it through a study, which compared the "work must pay" principle with every-day experience of welfare recipients. The article had been published in Journal of European Social Policy.

The "work must pay" principle is seen as an example of "social investment" approaches, an attempt to re-legitimise the welfare state within the predominant neoliberal critique of demoralizing effects of welfare as social consumption (Jenson 2009). It should maximise the returns of social expenditures by ensuring that it promotes active labour market participation. Microsimulation based on the "work must pay" principle has been used as one of the core approaches to the construction of the current Czech social benefit system, particularly the social assistance scheme. Compared to other measures introduced to the system within the neoliberal reforms in the past decades, it seems like a technical, neutral tool. In this sense, it is a useful example to show that the problem of the distance between the experience of the poor and the neoliberal shift in the construction of welfare does not lie only in the residuality and stigma, but in the principles around which it is constructed – the imagination of the recipient and the goals of the policies.

In "work must pay" policies, welfare recipients are seen as actors deciding between unemployment and permanent full-time employment, a strikingly different image from the findings of my research. The every-day experience of these people had been characterised by cycling in and out of accessible forms of employment, which were often precarious, temporary, semi-formal. People were combining the income from employment and/or welfare benefits with informal employment, support from wider family and loans, blurring of the borders between reliance on welfare support and employment as a main source of income. They often found themselves in a vicious circle, where the sources of income changes but the employment does not allow them to step out of the situation of poverty. Further, many

welfare recipients are facing multiple debt enforcements that push them towards semi-formal employment.

I included this study in this thesis to illustrate that the problem of the (Czech) system of protection of poor and low-income households lies in the widening gap between the construction of the policy and the reality of people who (still) receive some support. Even when targeted, the system is not able to address the problems of recurrent poverty and labour market insecurity of the most vulnerable groups[79]. It points to the limits of neoliberalism which is present even in social investment policies: seeing social benefits as a source of social problems ("people will not work if benefits become too generous") which can be remedied within the system, focusing primarily on individual motivations - while the structural factor beyond recurrent unemployment, low wages, over-indebtedness, or high housing costs are overlooked.

The residuality and stigma are an effect of these processes. As I have shown in chapter 3.1, the neoliberal reforms of social protection systems in the years 2004-2012 had institutionalized the primacy of the logic of individual responsibility, control and austerity. Both on the level of discourse as well in the policy implementation, they had confirmed the image of welfare recipients as second-class, "failed" members of the society, towards which controlling, paternalistic approaches can be (need to be) implemented (chapter 2.5). In reality it fastens a vicious circle. The poorest are trapped in a system which is often unable to target the causes of their situation, but makes them feel "like scum, like a lesser human being". Public opinion is that "benefits are often abused and received by people who do not deserve them" (chapter 3.1).

What causes the ongoing demand for retrenchment, particularly from regions with higher proportion of people facing economic insecurity?

Delegitimization of welfare and stigmatisation of its recipients also offers one clue to the puzzle from the introduction of this thesis: if there are so many people in an insecure

[79] One of the conclusion of the articla was, that functioning financial incentive "to make work pay" would allow working households to rise permanently above the poverty line. (It would also need to address the problem of over-indebtedness.)

situation, why are claims that are coming from regions most impacted by economic insecurity not calls for more inclusive, stronger social protection but claims for further retrenchment?

As I have shown in the book chapter On Economic Peripheries and Welfare State Retrenchment in Czechia, (part 3.3), the way we spoke about poverty in Czech Republic in the past decades contributed to invisibility of economic insecurity experienced by a large proportion of the population. The focus of social policies confirmed (stigmatised) the public image of poverty as a problem of a small group of social benefit recipients. This had been further institutionalised by the "social inclusion" discourse, which (unintentionally) completed public perception that poverty is primarily a problem of Roma inhabitants of socially excluded localities. The "failed poor" are thus imagined as a "problematic group" of Outsiders. Omission of structural causes, social conditions and their historical origins contributes to framing of their situation as a problem of failed morals, while the link between poverty and race allow for its culturalization. The Roma become visible as those trespassing the rules, as criminals, not as people in vulnerable social and economic positions. Further, the rest of society can appear as a non-problematic unit. While multiple scholars discussed these processes of racialization and securitisation of poverty in the context of neoliberalism (Powell, van Baar 2019, Fassin 2013, Wacquant 2009), I believe that my contribution allows for a better understanding of the attractiveness of such framing in a context of post-industrial periphery.

Struggles over deservingness become especially important in the situations when unemployment, low-wages and high debts impact a large proportion of population. Municipalities on the Czech (post-)industrial periphery, which had experienced greatest economic and social decay after 1989, were also municipalities that faced an increased inflow of poor Roma, pushed out of (new) economic centres. Increased segregation in housing, jobs or school contributed to mutual distrust and fear. Here, the Roma as the imagined "Other" are not distant. The presence of the Roma became a symbol of overall decay, deterioration of the living conditions, visible outcome of processes that were often beyond the control of municipal policies. During the height of the 2008 financial crisis, the anti-Romani rhetoric and protests became an expression of frustration over the complex problems of these regions.

The calls for benefits retrenchment which strongly resonate in these places combines a feeling of unfairness of social systems (which does not take into account economic struggle of large proportion of population, particularly those who are working) with a struggle over dignity (the need to distance oneself from the underserving poor becomes particularly

important in the context of decreased accessibility of stable employment for all) and intensely experienced insecurities over socio-economic changes in these cities (ascribed to the presence and behaviour of the Roma). Social benefits become part of the struggle over control as well as status and feeling of dignity.

In the article From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma, I have followed the impact of these processes on the debates about the Czech social assistance scheme in the years after the neoliberal reforms (2013-2021). In these debates, poverty, low wages, unemployment, or social exclusion are no longer portrayed a as problem per se. In the centre of the attention is the existence (or growing number) of "socially excluded localities", which are presented as a result of an under-regulated, "overgenerous" benefit system.

The existence of "localities" is seen primarily as a problem for those who live in their surroundings. Similar to local anti-Roma policies and demonstration, the debates are often framed in the language of citizenship. There is a strongly verbalised dichotomy between the image of the social benefit recipients as Roma inhabitants of the localities and "decent citizens", their neighbours. This dichotomy is embedded in the narratives of 2007-2012 neoliberal reforms: the source and core feature of "proper" behaviour and deservingness is work. Decent citizens are characterized by employment ("going to work") and hence proper behaviour ("getting up in the morning"). The racialized distinction between undeserving poor and "decent" citizens, serves as a symbolic confirmation of the membership in the "community of value".

In a sense racialized welfare does not share neoliberal optimism of work-based inclusion (chapter 2.3). "Post-neoliberal" amendments of social assistance legislation still follow the logic of control and increased conditionality. Yet, the main goal is no longer labour market inclusion but strengthening of the municipal power over the behaviour and movement of benefit recipients-Roma, with the aim of "protection" of those who live in the neighbourhood. The social system that is no longer understood as a tool of social protection is turning into a tool of a proactive border-making, hierarchisation between different groups of inhabitants experiencing economic insecurity. While these processes are embedded in the racial stereotypes and prejudice, seemingly colourblind neoliberal categories of deservingness served as a vehicle for their imposition, obscuring the structural causes of the situation.

Can the social system react to the experience to precarity (and other form of insecurities in current society) in a more inclusive way?

Above described processes amplified the stigmatisation and further diminished the protective role of welfare. Racialized welfare is no longer treated as a right that can be legitimately publicly claimed, but shifts towards a system of control, disciplination or exclusion. My main claim is that in this shift the Czech system of social protection lost its ability to serve as a tool for ensuring social citizenship. It does not provide all members of the society, particularly those in marginal positions, with an opportunity to constitute themselves as citizens.

In the beginning of this thesis (chapter 2.2), I have discussed two core aspects of social citizenship as a precondition of full participation in the society. The first one is economic, an acknowledgement of the economic precondition of full participation in the society and negative impact of inequality on mutual trust and solidarity. The second is concerned with participation and recognition.

As described above, the combination of retrenchment, conditionality and high level of benefit non-take up limited the protective role of the Czech social systems to a minimum. It has been repeatedly confirmed that neoliberal welfare retrenchments and conditionality contributes to the process of recommodification (chapter 2.3), and it would seem that Czech Republic is not an exception. On one hand, this is due to the primacy of labour market inclusion in welfare provision. There is also extensive evidence (chapter 2.4) that the push to accept a job independently of its quality often replicates precarious status (high vulnerability on the labour market) of those receiving the support. We can observe a similar trend in the Czech system of social assistance. On the other hand, retrenchment of the welfare also leads to increased reliance on financial products, which again increases the control of the "market", in this case through private financial product providers (Soederberg, 2014). High level of over-indebtedness (from consumer loans) or increased reliance of households on mortgages indicates that this might be also the case of Czech Republic.

Yet, in working on this thesis, I become less interested in this already increasingly well-researched process of welfare restructuring and its effects on the economic situation/increased (replicated) vulnerability of the poor. Looking at the outcomes of the development of the past years, I am still amazed by the general acceptance of this process. As I discuss in the article From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma, even the political counter-narrative (opposition to controlling measures) was embedded in neoliberal

discourse—emphasizing individualized support, approaching welfare as a minimal safety net targeted towards the poorest and maintaining a focus on social exclusion as a core problem.

Equal position in society – and ability to claim citizenship rights – is shaped by the feeling of recognition (and ability to claim such recognition, Isin 2009). In this sense, the social citizenship perspective is not primarily about expansion of rights, but about involvement of those most concerned in the process of their negotiation (Olson 2006, Laruffa 2022).

I believe that the most important effect of neoliberalism on dismantlement of social citizenship lies in depriving poor people of a voice in this debate, of the right to make claims, of recognition of their experience and needs. There is a lack of attention, language to address the structural causes of the low-wage labour market and widespread economic insecurity in a way which would allow those who are experiencing it to maintain their dignity.

Neoliberalism is a project trying to change the subjectivity of the poor. The main shift it brought to the system of social protection of poor and low-income households - both on the symbolical, discursive level, as in their implementation in every-day realities - confirmed the second-class status of poor people in a society. "Underserving poor", beggars that can't be choosers - the perception of second-class citizen is not only voiced in the public space but internalized by those who struggle to make ends meets (Chapter 2.5, 3.1). Neoliberal changes and the racializ ation of the Czech social system send a strong message to poor people – independently of their race - that they are not full members of the society.

If we want a social system that would serve as a tool of inclusion, social citizenship in a sense of a possibility of full membership in a society, we need to return not only to the protective role of social protection in economic sense, but to its participatory goal. To ensure inclusion, the system of social protection needs to be seen as a tool which would allow more vulnerable members of the society to speak about their experience, while maintaining dignity and an image of self as a "good" citizen (in sense of full membership). This would require a shift in the perception of the poor from an image of those who need to be "activated" to allow them a position of "experts on their lifes" (Lister 2007), implying also a more critical approach to expert-constructed policy knowledge and its depoliticizing effects (Laruffa 2022). In this sense, social citizenship is not only concerned with promotion of social goals but democratisation of the process.

In this thesis, I have framed vulnerability of some groups through the concept of (labour market) precarity. However, as we have been experiencing in the past years with COVID and

rising energy prices, and as we may expect in the context of climate crisis, we might be entering a period of increasing insecurities, with very unequal impacts on different groups. We also observe that these processes are paralleled by increased social fragmentation and distrust in the democracy. In this sense, it might be time to reimagine social rights beyond the ability to quiet "discontent masses", and start to think about them in the frame of social citizenship, in which recognition and participation are equally important.

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6 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFDC - Aid to Families with Dependent Children (USA)

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CSU – Czech Statistical Office

EU – European Union

ESF – European Social Fund

Eurostat – Statistical office of the European Union

IPSI - Institute for Social Inclusion *(Institut pro sociální inkluzi)*

MDAA - Material Distress Assistance Act (*Zákon o pomoci v hmotné nouzi)*

MP – Member of parliament

MPSV – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

OECD –Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RILSA - Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs

TANF - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (USA)

UK – United Kingdom

USA – United states of America

7 LIST OF FIGURES

8 APPENDIXES

8.1 Overview of projects realized during my PhD study

- 2014 – 2015. *Between Welfare and Precarious Work - Analyse of Financial Motivation for Employment*. Centre for Social Issues – SPOT. Funding: Agency for Social Inclusion, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

  Modelling of the impact of the social assistance on the financial situation of low-income households followed by qualitative research between welfare recipients and labour office employee in two Czech post-industrial regions. (semi-structured interviews / two municipalities: North Moravia, North Bohemia)
- 2015 – 2016 *Zero Tolerance Policies in Litvínov and Duchcov***.** Centre for Social Issues – SPOT Funding: Agency for Social Inclusion, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

  Case study of Zero Tolerance in Two Czech municipalities in North Bohemia, policing and securitisation of welfare policies. (semi-structured interviews, participatory observation / Litvínov, Duchcov)
- 2014 - 2015 *Prevention of Spatial Segregation and Support of Social Integration of Foreigners Working in the Manufacturing Industry*, Multicultural Centre Prague / Charles University Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography. Funding: *Technological Agency of the Czech Republic*

  Qualitative research on the local impact of employment of foreigner workers in manufacturing industry (semi-structured interviews, participatory observation / Pardubice).
- 2016 *Social Progress Watch - Czech Republic 2016*, Multicultural Centre Prague. Funding: European Commission.

  Author of the chapter on social protection systems.
- 2016 *Women behind the Counter. Transformations of Work and Working Conditions of Domestic and Foreign Retail Workers.* Multicultural Centre Prague. Funding: Norway funds

  Qualitative research between migrant workers working in retail, cooperation on final project publication on precarious employment in retail (semi-structured interviews / Prague).

- 2018 *Way to Work – Strengthening the Links Between Active Labour Market Policy Measures and Social Support Services* Funding: European Commission.
  Author of Peer Country Comments Paper for the Czech Republic.
- 2017, 2019 *Care Arrangements and Work-Life Reconciliation Strategies of Migrants in the Czech Republic*, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences. Funding: Grant Agency of the Czech Republic
  Narrative interviews with Ukrainian female labour migrant. Data analysis/article on agency and precarity (in-depth narrative interviews / Prague).
- 2017-2021 „*Good work" in Municipality: Possibilities of Employment of the People at Risk of Social Exclusion on Municipal Level.* Centre for Social Issues – SPOT. Funding: European Social Fund
  Applied research project on the possibilities and forms of public employment and social service provision on municipal level. Quantitative and qualitative analytical work on unemployment, precarity, social benefits, over-indebtedness (semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participatory observation / Prague, Brno, Orlová, Děčín, Chomutov, Kadaň, Mníšek pod Brdy, Žďár nad Sázavou, Hanušovice).
- 2018-2021*Strategy of Regional Development CZ 21+: Social Pillar*. Ministry of Regional Development, Funding: Ministry of Regional Development
  Facilitation of Social Pillar working group, expert consultation.
- 2019-2021. *Electronic watch - Rethinking Value Chains.* Centre for Social Issues – SPOT. Funding: Electronics Watch
  Independent Monitoring for Public Procurement / Research on working conditions in electronic industry in Czechia (semi-structured interviews, participatory observation / Kutná hora, Brno).
- 2021-2022 *Strategy of Combating Homelessness in Prague for the years 2022-2032***.** Prague City Hall. Funding: Prague City Hall
  Analysis of current policies, theoretical framework for the strategy, priorities, goals, facilitation of the process.
- 2021-2022 *Situational Analysis and Project Evaluation in Dubí* Centre for Social Issues – SPOT. Funding: Dubí municipality
  Consultation on research/evaluation of participatory project in socially excluded locality in the Dubí municipality (semistructured interviews, participatory observation / Dubí, Litvínov)

- 2020-2023 *Constructing and Performing Citizenship through Debt in the Czech Republic.* Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences. Funding: Grant Agency of the Czech Republic

  Qualitative research project examining how debt and usage of credit and loans influences citizenship hierarchies in contemporary Czech society. (in-depth narrative interviews, participatory observation / two municipalities: Central and North Bohemia)

8.2 Participation in working group and committees

2015-ongoing *Platforma pro minimální důstojnou mzdu* – one of the main authors

2016-ongoing *Bytová komise MČ Praha 7* – head of the comittee

2019-ongoing *Krizový fond Rapid Re-housing* – member

2019 *Pracovní skupina MPSV k revizi dávek na bydlení* – participant

2019-2020 *Pracovní skupina MPSV k revizi tzv. Patnáctera pro boj s chudobou* – participant

2020-ongoing Fond *podpory bydlení. Výbor dobré vůle Olgy Havlové.* – member

8.3 Selected public debates[80]

(2020) Zastoupení Evropské komise v Praze. *Dopady pandemie na společnost - Co říkají data?* 16.10. 2020. Recording: https://fb.watch/e-G6T3m9lR/

MPSV. *Fórum sociální politiky: Nízké mzdy, prekérní práce, skrytá chudoba* 7. 9. 2021. Recording: https://socialnipolitika.eu/2021/11/rodina-v-dobe-covidu-19-zaznam-z-fora-rodinne-politiky-2021/

(2021) Přístav 18600. *Urbanismus a bezpečí. Nulová tolerance – o příčinách sekuritizace veřejného prostoru.* 14. 9. 2021

Ekologické dny Olomouc. *Jsme rozděleni klimatem? Sociální souvislosti environmentální krize.* 26. 9. 2021. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAvHaIQoTm4

Český Rozhlas Plus. *Jak postavit Česko na nohy? Úkoly pro novou vládu.* 26. 10. 2021. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VJKICVh5dI

Greenpeace. *Co bude znamenat transformace pro obyčejnou českou rodinu?* 19. 10. 2021. Recoding: https://fb.watch/e-Gb4S26ie/

Aktuálně.cz / Inspirační forum Jihlava. *Chudé Česko – debata o tom, co pálí většinu z nás. 2*8. 10. 2021. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1Bp74VqbXc

(2022) MPSV / Konference Sociální práce ve veřejné správě. *Minimální důstojná mzda a mzdy sociálních pracovníků* 15. 2022

Německá ambasáda v Praze. *Café Collaborations | The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Future of Labour* 3. 5. 2022

Katedra environmentálních studií Masarykovy univerzity, NaZemi, Re-set / Nekonference Nerůst a sociálně-ekologická transformace: *Ekologická krize a sociální otázka: Jak naplnit základní potřeby všech v ekologických mezích* 9. 9. 2022

Česká asociace streetwork. *Veřejná diskuze: Projevy chudoby ve velkém městě* 19. 9. 2022

Člověk v ohrození *Feeling or being left-behind: Socio-economic inequality as a driver of disinformation belief, polarization, and hatred (not only) of migrants* 15. 11. 2022

[80] I do not include academic presentations and conferences

8.4 Selected media outcomes

(2018) iRozhlas. *Čím víc si vyděláte, tím méně vám zbude. Kalkulačka sociálních dávek ukazuje absurditu exekucí* https://www.irozhlas.cz/ekonomika/kalkulacka-socialni-davky-exekuce_1811280900_jab

168hodin/Česká televise. *Čím více vydělají, tím méně jim zbyde. Lidem v exekuci se vyplatí pracovat málo* https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/2668838-cim-vice-vydelaji-tim-mene-jim-zbyde-lidem-v-exekuci-se-vyplati-pracovat-malo

Seznam.cz *Dávky se lidem v exekuci vyplatí.* https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/paradox-exekuci-proc-se-vetsine-dluzniku-nevyplati-legalne-pracovat-61972

(2019) Salon Práva/Novinky.cz. *Chudoba má různé formy, říká sociální antropoložka Lucie Trlifajová* https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/clanek/chudoba-ma-ruzne-formy-rika-socialni-antropolozka-lucie-trlifajova-40294598

DVTV/Aktuálně.cz. *Expertka: Polovina lidí nevydělá na důstojný život, nemá na dovolenou ani tramvajenku* https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/expertka-polovina-lidi-nevydela-na-dustojny-zivot-nema-na-do/r~7ad29a7271da11e9b9980cc47ab5f122/mi

Radio Wave/Český Rozhlas *Minimální důstojná mzda? Nedosáhne na ni polovina Čechů, říkají expertky, jež se podílely na výpočtu* https://wave.rozhlas.cz/minimalni-dustojna-mzda-nedosahne-na-ni-polovina-cechu-rikaji-expertky-jez-se-8123326

(2020) Deník N. *V této krizi zaznívá mnohem méně, že se lidé dost nesnažili, nešetřili a mohou si za ni sami, říká socioložka*. https://denikn.cz/506383/soucasna-krize-nastinila-financni-nejistotu-ve-velkych-mestech-rika-sociolozka/

Kolaps/A2larm*. Lucie Trlifajová: Nejvíc lidí ohrožených společenským propadem registrujeme v Praze.* https://a2larm.cz/2020/11/kolaps-15-lucie-trlifajova-nejvic-lidi-ohrozenych-spolecenskym-propadem-registrujeme-v-praze/

(2021) Český Rozhlas Plus. *Vize z krize. Sociální antropoložka Lucie Trlifajová: Vize o chudobě. Mluvme o nízkých mzdách a prekérní práci* https://www.irozhlas.cz/zivotni-styl/spolecnost/podcast-vize-z-krize-lucie-trlifajova_2102031000_mpa

Český Rozhlas Plus. *„Znám jenom kuchaře a číšníky, nemá mi ani kdo půjčit.“ Práce v pandemii? Nejistota i nové strategie.* https://plus.rozhlas.cz/zivot-behem-pandemie-dokumentarni-serie-apoleny-rychlikove-o-lidech-kterym-se-8429936/2

Salon Práva/Novinky.cz: *Boj s emisemi je příležitost:* https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/clanek/boj-s-emisemi-je-prilezitost-debata-salonu-na-ekologickych-dnech-olomouc-40373095

A2larm. *„Propad stovky tisíc domácností do chudoby může mít nedozírné následky," říkají experti:* https://a2larm.cz/2021/11/propad-stovky-tisic-domacnosti-do-chudoby-muze-mit-nedozirne-nasledky-rikaji-experti/

TV Noe. V souvislostech – Lucie *Trlifajová: Problém chudoby:* https://www.tvnoe.cz/porad/31116-v-souvislostech-lucie-trlifajova-problem-chudoby

NRC (Nizozemsko). *Waarom niemand de straat op gaat voor de 'Tsjechische George Floyd':* https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/10/07/waarom-niemand-de-straat-op-gaat-voor-de-tsjechische-george-floyd-a4061103

(2022) A2larm – Kolaps *Příjmová nejistota vede k radikalizaci, říkají autoři konceptu minimální důstojné mzdy* https://a2larm.cz/2022/05/prijmova-nejistota-vede-k-radikalizaci-rikaji-autori-konceptu-minimalni-dustojne-mzdy/

Aktuálně.cz *Sociolożka: Češi pracují dlouhé hodiny. Není pravda, že si za nízký plat mohou sami* https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/sociolozka-o-minimalni-dustojne-mzde/

Český Rozhlas Plus. *Lidé budou solidární k utahování opasků. Musí ale vidět, že šetří všichni, upozorňuje sociální antropoložka Trlifajová* https://plus.rozhlas.cz/lide-budou-solidarni-k-utahovani-opasku-musi-ale-videt-ze-setri-vsichni-8734552

Seznam zprávy. *„Dřív to nešlo, teď ano." Pomoc Ukrajincům lidi frustruje, říká expertka* https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/audio-podcast-ptam-se-ja-drahe-energie-i-potraviny-ktere-domacnosti-zchudnou-200903

Český Rozhlas Plus. *Lidé se za svou sociální situaci stále často stydí, popisuje sociální antropoložka Trlifajová* https://plus.rozhlas.cz/lide-se-za-svou-socialni-situaci-stale-casto-stydi-popisuje-socialni-8767654

A2larm. *Nebavme se o sociálních dávkách, ale o daních a výši mezd.* https://a2larm.cz/2022/05/nebavme-se-o-socialnich-davkach-ale-o-danich-a-vysi-mezd-rika-lucie-trlifajova/

Český Rozhlas Plus. *Trlifajová: Čím chudší člověk, tím víc se mu to předhazuje jako jeho chyba, že se dost nesnaží.* https://www.irozhlas.cz/zivotni-styl/spolecnost/trlifajova-cim-chudsi-clovek-tim-vic-se-mu-predhazuje-jako-jeho-chyba-ze-se-dost_2206151625_kac

Zaostřeno / Český Rozhlas. *V globále nejsou Češi až tak zadlužení, jak se na první pohled zdá, upozorňuje ředitel firmy, která řeší pohledávky* https://plus.rozhlas.cz/v-globale-nejsou-cesi-az-tak-zadluzeni-jak-se-na-prvni-pohled-zda-upozornuje-8844384