

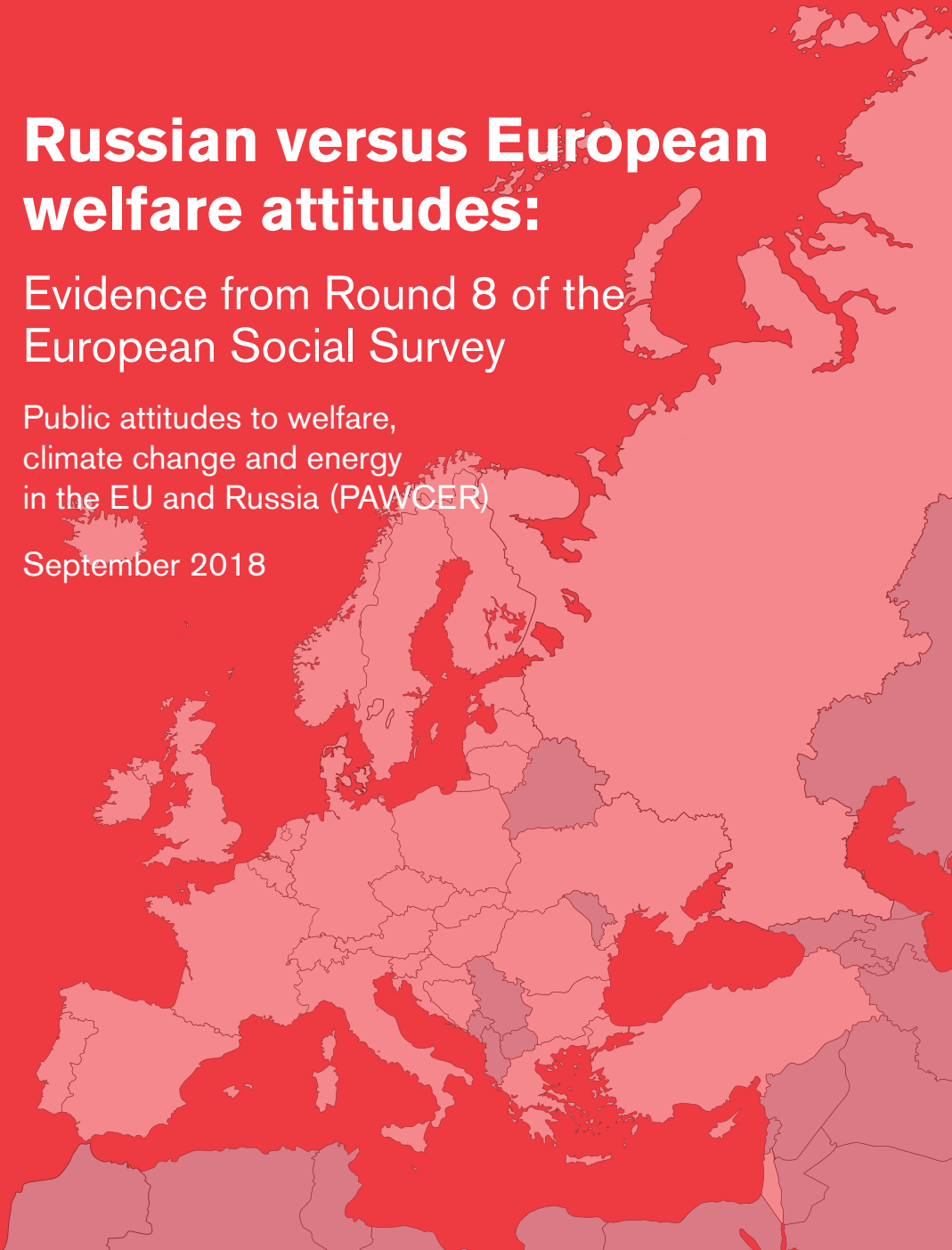


Russian versus European welfare attitudes:

Evidence from Round 8 of the European Social Survey

Public attitudes to welfare, climate change and energy in the EU and Russia (PAWCER)

September 2018



Russian versus European welfare attitudes: Evidence from Round 8 of the European Social Survey

Background

Europe and Russia have a long common history. Over time, a great number of different nations have evolved and dissolved in these regions, each developing their own cultural backgrounds, institutions and values. The relations between Russia and Europe, or European countries, have not been without conflicts stemming from various cultural (e.g., different attitudes and values) and structural (e.g., competition for resources) differences. Such sources of conflict can also interact.

However, roads to peace can arise and be developed from cultural and structural sources as well. Hence, in order to understand past and present conflicts—as well as to find ways to build a shared identity and foster mutual understanding in order to prevent potential future conflicts—among other things knowledge about public opinion in the different nations is important. In this regard, comparative studies of welfare attitudes in Russia and Europe can make a valuable contribution to mutual understanding.

Report contents

Drawing on data from the eighth round of the ESS, fielded in 2016/17, the report presents welfare attitudes in Russia and Europe, thus facilitating their comparison. It covers two main topics: public support for proposed changes to social protection systems, and public support for current social policies targeted at specific vulnerable groups. The latter includes income redistribution and the poor, unemployment benefits and the unemployed, public pensions and the elderly, childcare and working parents, and the accessibility to social rights for migrants.

The authors of this issue

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The PAWCER Project

The ERA.Net RUS Plus initiative, funded by the EU 7th Framework, aims at enhancing the coordination of research programmes between the EU Member States and Associated Countries, and Russia (www.era.net-rus.eu). In 2015, the initiative funded the PAWCER project, which is a comparative research project on Public Attitudes to Welfare, Climate Change and Energy in the EU and Russia.

PAWCER aims to contribute to the knowledge about contemporary Russian and European societies in two ways: it facilitates the participation of Russia in the eighth round of the European Social Survey (ESS), and it supports comparative analysis, with a particular focus on how Russian attitudes contrast with those elsewhere in Europe on various topics. This top-line report is produced within the frames of Work Package 3 of PAWCER, which is titled *Welfare Attitudes under Changing Circumstances: Solidarities under Pressure*.

Section 1. Opinions about proposed welfare reforms

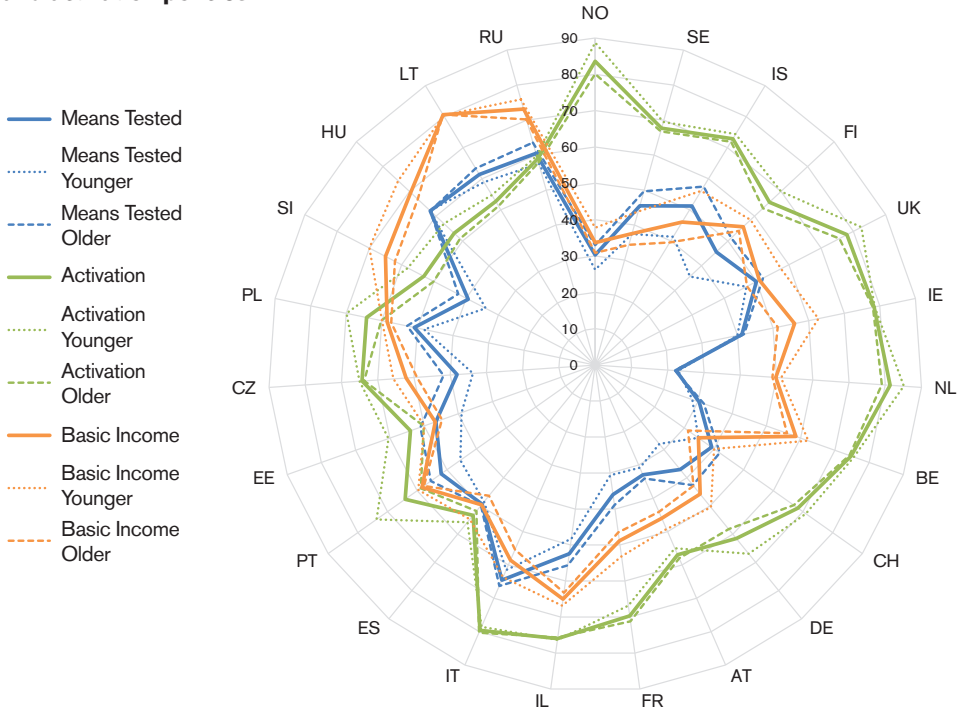
Reforming the welfare state: most popular in Eastern and Southern regions

In many welfare states, the challenges posed by the nearly universal trends of growing inequality, migration, ageing, globalisation and digitalisation of work have been further aggravated by the recent economic crisis. This had implications for the relations between countries: social

policies take an important role in the discussion about migration and economic conditions as they are seen as an incentive for migrants to come to a country or as a burden for a country's economy. At the same time, these trends put the sustainability of social policies under pressure and thus bring back to the political agenda discussions about policy reforms.¹

The ESS asks respondents for their opinions about several options for welfare reform.

Figure 1. Preferences for a full turn to means-tested benefits, a basic income scheme and activation policies



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

Notes: Means Tested: percentage of respondents being in favour or strongly in favour of benefits directed only to the poor; Activation: percentage of respondents being in favour or strongly in favour of the government spending more on education and training programmes for the unemployed at the cost of reducing unemployment benefit; Basic Income: percentage of respondents being in favour or strongly in favour of having a basic income scheme. All questions were answered on a 4-point scale: 'strongly against', 'against', 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour'. The age groups were defined as born before or in 1975 (the older) and after 1975 (the younger). This categorises people as having been politically socialised before or after the fall of communism.

One proposal is to introduce a universal basic income: a scheme that would provide a flat-rate cash transfer to all citizens irrespective of their previous contributions and present situation. The aim of a universal basic income scheme is to gradually replace all other forms of transfer. This proposal has gained a lot of traction with policymakers and academics recently, and at present several experiments are underway in European countries. Another proposal is to make all social transfers and services needs based. While practically all European countries use means testing to channel resources to people in need, this usually accounts for only a small fraction of total welfare spending, as most welfare benefits are allocated based on previous contributions or the principle of universality.²

Thus, means testing all benefits would be a radical proposal for many ESS countries, especially the Eastern and Southern European ones where the principle of means testing was only introduced in the 1990s. The third option proposes spending more on education and training of the unemployed at the expense of cutting down on unemployment benefits. This approach is usually referred to as 'activation policies' and has already been implemented in many European countries.

The ESS data shows that activation policies attract the strongest support in a large majority of countries, while a complete turn to means testing is the least popular idea (see Figure 1). With regard to a universal basic income, people have contrasting views: about half of the population is in favour of such a system, while the rest is opposed to it. The countries in which people are the least in favour of this scheme are Norway, Switzerland and Sweden, whereas the countries where people are most in favour are Lithuania and Russia. The latter two, together with Hungary and Slovenia, are also the only countries where a basic income is the most popular social policy reform overall.

Given that each of these four countries are former communist states marked by universal welfare provision, the most likely conclusion is that the legacy of a universal welfare state leads to the acceptance of a basic income scheme. However, whilst in Norway and Sweden social policy is also organised on the basis of a universal welfare state, these countries are among those with the lowest support for a basic income scheme.

Furthermore, we cannot find a marked difference if we divide the population into two age groups: an older group that lived during communism in the East or during the heyday of the welfare state in the West, and a younger group that was raised in the globalised world led by liberal economic principles. However, the ESS data shows that in almost all countries, the younger age group is more supportive of activation and a universal basic income than the older age group. The older group, on the other hand, is more in favour of the more traditional means-tested social policy programmes than the younger.

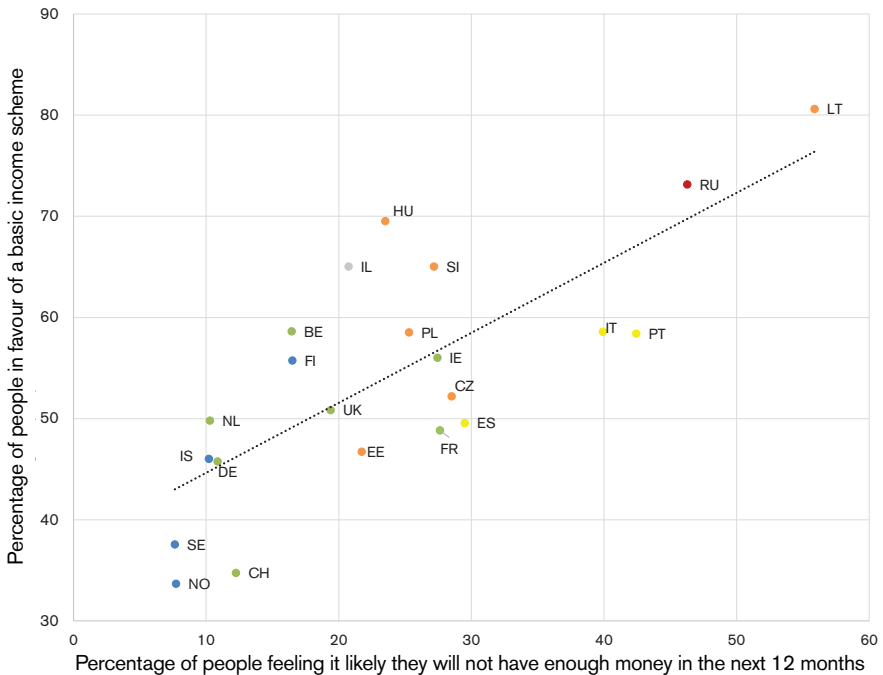
We can identify some differences between European regions regarding welfare policy preferences: while in most Northern and Western European countries people clearly favour activation policies over other options, in most Southern and Eastern European countries people do not show substantial differences concerning their preferences for the three policy proposals. As already mentioned, some Eastern European countries—Russia, Lithuania, Hungary and Slovenia—stand out, with more than 60 per cent of the population being in favour of a basic income scheme. In Russia, Lithuania, Hungary and Italy the support for all three proposed reforms surpasses the 50 per cent threshold among all age groups, which may indicate widespread dissatisfaction with the existing systems.

Financial insecurity and support for basic income are high in Eastern and Southern Europe

If it is not the legacy of a universal welfare state, then what makes people in Russia and Lithuania prefer a basic income scheme more than people in Norway and Sweden do? Over 45 per cent of Russian and Lithuanian respondents think that they are not likely to have enough money for their household necessities in the next 12 months. In Norway and Sweden, less than 13 per cent of respondents share this fear. This relationship generally holds true for the sample of European countries: the stronger the concern for future unstable economic conditions in a country, the stronger the preference for a basic income scheme (see Figure 2).

With a few exceptions, we can identify the different regions in the figure: the Nordic countries are distinguished by low to medium support for a basic income while the fear for not having enough money is low; in Western European countries, the fear is slightly stronger as is the support for a basic income; in Eastern Europe, the fear is relatively high as well as the support for a basic income; while the Southern European countries are characterized by having a strong fear but a comparatively low (but still strong) support for a basic income scheme. Russia and Lithuania form a group of their own, distinguished by a strong fear of not having enough money in the future, as well as strong support for a basic income scheme.

Figure 2. Support for basic income scheme vs. perceived unstable financial future



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

Notes: Percentage of respondents in favour or strongly in favour of a basic income scheme, answered on a 4-point scale: 'strongly against', 'against', 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour'. Percentage of people feeling it likely or very likely they will not have enough money to cover household necessities in the next 12 months, answered on a 4-point scale: 'not at all likely', 'not very likely', 'likely' or 'very likely'. Correlation across all countries: $r=0.76$, excluding Russia and Lithuania: $r=0.59$.

Section 2. Solidarity with people in need

Solidarity with the poor is high all over Europe

Solidarity with poor people, measured as the agreement with the statement ‘the government should take measures to reduce income inequality’, receives strong support all over Europe. In all countries except for the Czech Republic, more than 60 per cent of the population are in favour of redistribution.

Figure 3 shows that there is only a weak relationship between the actual level of income inequality, measured by the Gini index, and support for redistribution. While the Southern European countries have a high level of income inequality paired with strong support for redistribution, and the Nordic countries are characterized by a low inequality and an average to low support for redistribution, the Eastern European countries are scattered around all levels of inequality and support for redistribution. Russia is marked by high inequality and comparatively low support for redistribution.

Figure 3. Support for redistribution vs. Gini Coefficient



Source: European Social Survey Round 8, The Standardized World Income Inequality Database 2018

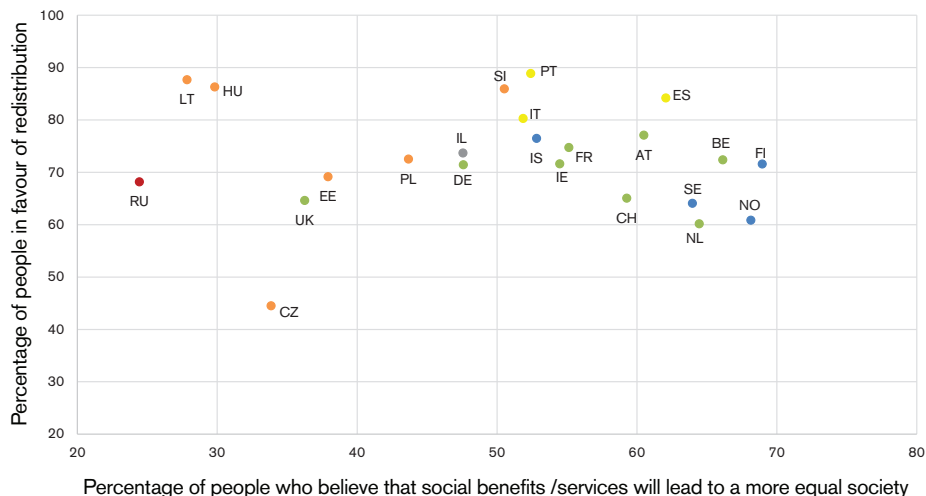
Notes: The percentage of people in favour of redistribution is measured by the percentage of people who agree or strongly agree with the statement: ‘The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels’. Answers were given on a 5-point scale: ‘agree strongly’, ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘disagree strongly’. The correlation for all countries is $r=0.33$. When excluding Eastern Europe, Russia and Israel, the correlation increases to $r=0.53$.

Russians and Eastern Europeans are less confident that social benefits lead to more equality

If we look at how people perceive the effectiveness of the social benefits system in their country—i.e., whether they believe that social benefits will lead to more equality—we again find regional patterns, but not a strong overall relationship. People support the idea that the government is responsible for reducing income inequality independently of whether

they think the government's social services will be successful (see Figure 4). People in the Nordic countries are quite confident that social benefits will lead to more equality, whereas people in the Eastern European countries are at the other end of the scale. Russia stands out as a distinctive case, with only a quarter of the population believing in the equalising effects of their welfare state, which may also contribute to Russians not being as favourable of the idea of income redistribution as one would expect, given the high level of inequality in this country.

Figure 4. Average support for redistribution vs. the percentage of people who believe that social benefits/services lead to a more equal society



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

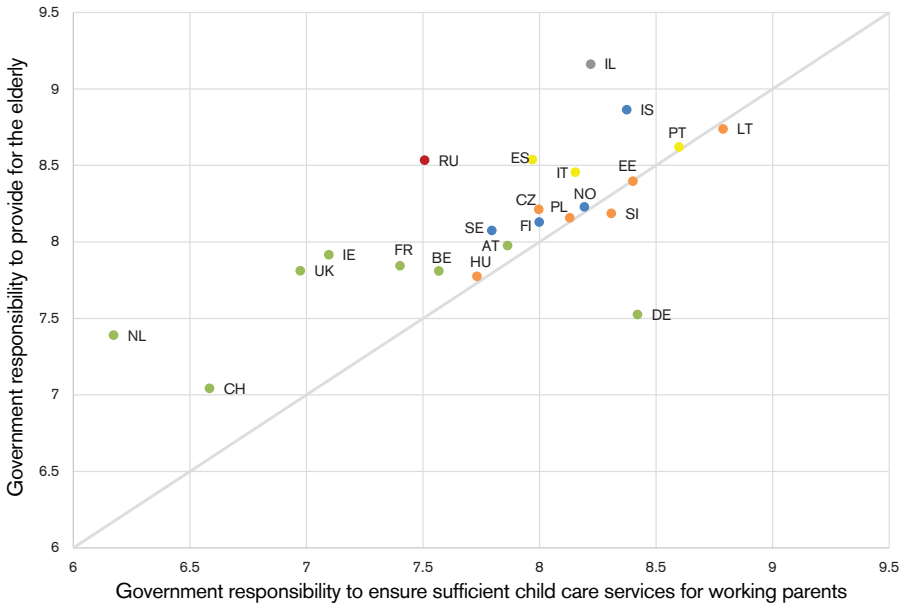
Notes: The preference for redistribution is measured by the agreement with the statement: 'The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels'. The belief in the effectiveness of the social benefits system is measured by the agreement with the statement: 'Social benefits and services in [country] lead to a more equal society'. Both questions were answered on a 5-point scale: 'agree strongly', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly'. The numbers refer to the percentage of people who agree or strongly agree with the respective statement. The correlation between the two variables amounts to $r=0.08$.

No evidence for the 'grey peril' in Europe and Russia: the public supports welfare for the elderly and the young

All over Europe, countries are confronted with an ageing society. Some researchers and media postulate therefore a 'grey peril': the more old people there are in the population, the higher is their political clout, leading to an increase in social benefits and services that are directed to the elderly, such as pensions or health care.³ As social expenditure is considered to have reached its upper limits in many countries, increasing spending on the elderly may be seen as being achieved at the expense of services directed to younger cohorts, such as childcare.

Despite this concern, we find that all over Europe, people think that it is the government's responsibility to provide both a decent standard of living for the old, as well as childcare services for working parents (see Figure 5). However, the data also shows that in all countries, except for Germany, Slovenia and Lithuania, support for the elderly is slightly higher than for childcare services. While in the Eastern European and Nordic countries (except for Iceland), both services are supported to about the same degree (these countries lie close to the diagonal in Figure 5), the Western European countries (except for Germany) support benefits for the elderly more than childcare services (these countries lie above the diagonal in Figure 5). Similar to the Netherlands and Israel, in Russia, support for the elderly is considerably stronger than support for childcare.

Figure 5. Preferences for government responsibility for the elderly vs. preferences for government responsibility for child care services for working parents



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

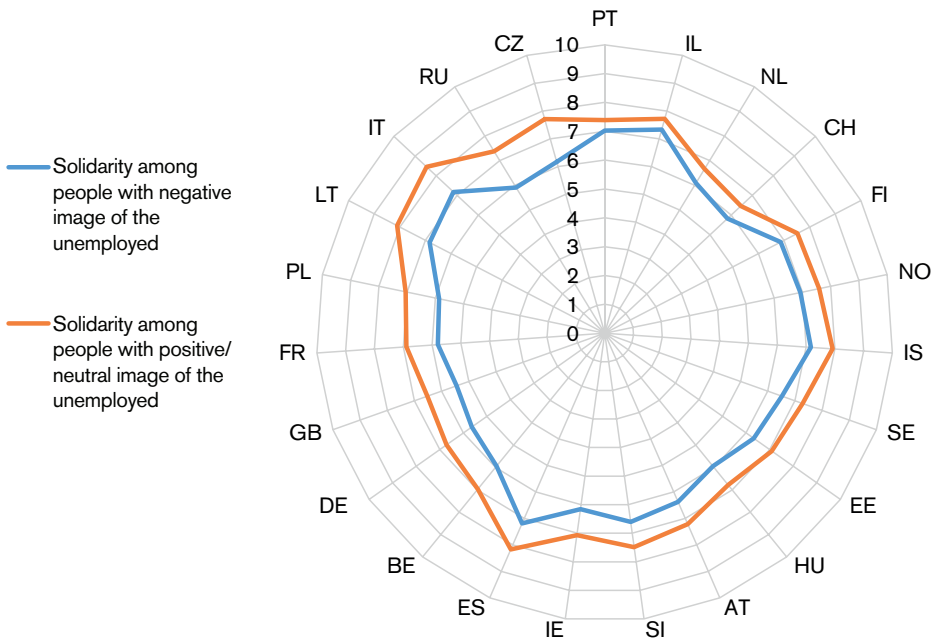
Notes: Both questions were answered on an 11-point scale that ranges from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for 'should not be the government's responsibility at all' and 10 stands for 'should be entirely the government's responsibility'. The diagonal represents equal support for both social services. The correlation between the two variables equals $r=0.70$.

Concerns about the work ethic of unemployed people do not undermine solidarity towards them

While the majority of Europeans are in favour of overhauling the unemployment support system with a stronger emphasis on activation (see Figure 1), this does not automatically imply a lack of solidarity with unemployed people. Figure 6 helps to illustrate this point. It compares the average levels of solidarity with the unemployed between two groups of people: those who think that unemployed people do not really try to find jobs, and those who are neutral or disagree

with this idea. As expected, in all countries, those who have negative attitudes also tend to show less solidarity. However, it is remarkable that in none of the countries does the average support score fall below the midpoint, even among people with doubts about the work ethic of unemployed people. In other words, people in Europe firmly believe in social rights for the unemployed, no matter how 'deserving' they are considered to be.⁴ Russia stands out in this respect by one of the largest gaps in solidarity between the two groups, as well as by overall lower levels of solidarity with the unemployed.

Figure 6. Solidarity with the unemployed among people with positive/neutral and negative images of the unemployed



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

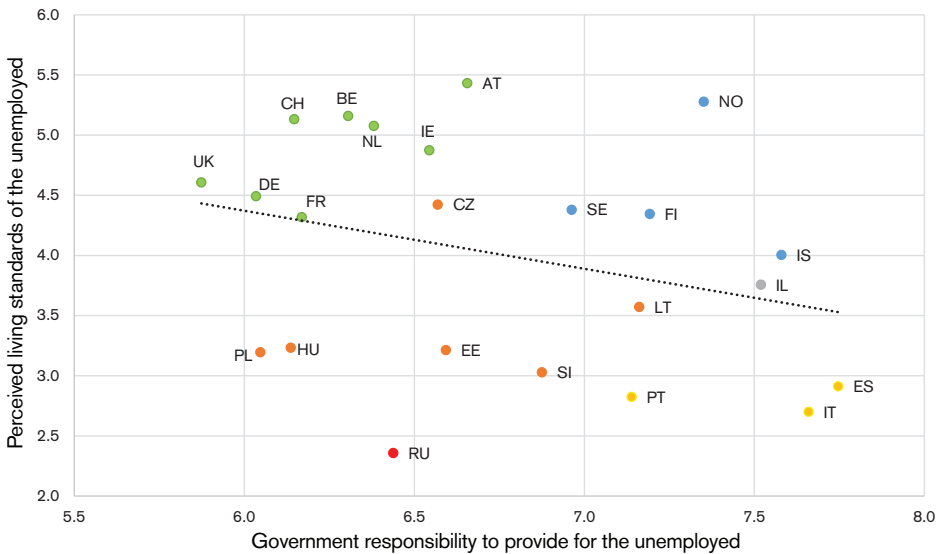
Notes: groups with positive/neutral and negative images of the unemployed are defined based on the question that asked to what extent the respondents agree with the statement that 'most unemployed people do not really try to find a job'. People with positive/neutral images are those who answered 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly'. People with a negative image are those who answered 'agree strongly' or 'agree'. Solidarity with the unemployed is defined by the question which asked respondents to what extent they agree with the statement that is the government's responsibility to ensure the living standards of the unemployed. Responses were measured on an 11-point scale that ranges from 0 to 10, where 0 denotes 'should not be the government's responsibility at all', and 10, 'should be entirely the government's responsibility'.

Comparatively low support for the unemployed in Russia, even though the living standards of the unemployed is perceived as very low

General perceptions of the living standards of unemployed people may also influence how much solidarity the public shows towards them: countries where the perceived living conditions are low, also exhibit higher average levels of support (see Figure 7). This negative relationship is observed within each country except for Austria. Overall, on these two dimensions, four regional groups can be distinguished. Southern Europeans have some of the lowest evaluations of the living standards of their unemployed compatriots combined with a strong solidarity, while for Western Europeans

the opposite is true. People in the Nordic countries have more positive opinions about the living conditions of unemployed people, but nonetheless they express strong solidarity. In Eastern Europe, people’s perceptions of the living standards of the unemployed are low, but solidarity is nonetheless weak. Russia is a clear outlier: people here are the most dissatisfied with the living conditions of the unemployed, but this does not lead to strong solidarity. One possible explanation is that Russians might not have a favourable opinion about the general living standards in their country either: as shown in Figure 2, the proportion of people who anticipate financial difficulties is one of the highest and Russians also have the lowest evaluations of the living standards of pensioners.⁵

Figure 7. Perceived standards of living vs. solidarity with the unemployed



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

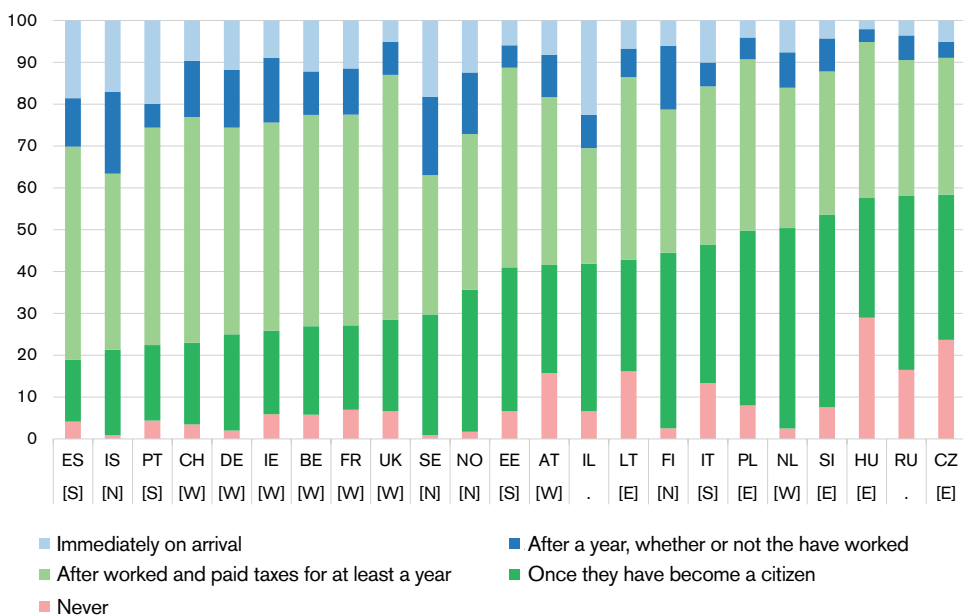
Notes: the perceived living standards of the unemployed are measured by a question that asked: ‘What do you think overall about the standard of living of people who are unemployed?’ The answers were recorded on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 stands for ‘extremely bad’ and 10 means ‘extremely good’. The correlation between the two variables is $r=0.3$, excluding Russia $r=0.37$.

Eastern Europeans and Russians are the most reserved about the social rights of migrants

The ESS Welfare Attitudes module also addresses the question of the conditions under which people migrating from other countries 'should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here'. The results indicate that Eastern Europeans are particularly opposed to the social rights of immigrants (so-called welfare chauvinism⁶): in each of these countries, two-fifths or more of respondents state that immigrants should either never be granted access to the same social benefits as the native-born citizens or only

be granted them after becoming citizens (see Figure 8). At the same time, in these countries, less than a fifth of people are in favour of granting equal access on arrival or after a year, irrespective of whether the people concerned have worked. This pattern of attitudes also holds for Russia, indicating that Russians are similarly relatively reserved about the social rights of immigrants. In the Western, Southern and especially Nordic European countries, people appear to be more open to the idea of universal social rights. There are, however, exceptions: large proportions of people in the Netherlands, Italy, Finland and Austria are as restrictive as the Eastern Europeans in general.

Figure 8. Preferences regarding the granting of social rights to immigrants



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

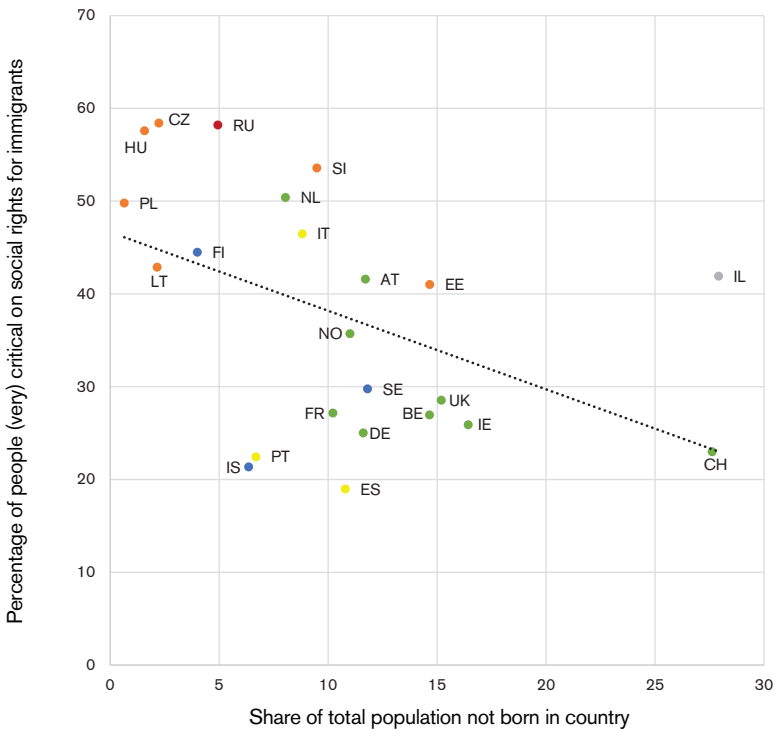
Notes: the precise formulation of the question is: 'Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?' Labels in brackets indicate regions: [S] stands for Southern Europe, [N] for Northern Europe, [W] for Western Europe and [E] for Eastern Europe.

Unfamiliarity with migrants contributes to the high welfare chauvinism in Eastern Europe

Some researchers have argued that people are more negative towards migrants when they have limited contact with them.⁷ The results presented in Figure 9 indeed indicate that welfare chauvinism is higher in countries where the levels of migration (measured as the proportion of the population not born in the country) are lower. It is possible to detect

two groups of countries here: a smaller one consisting of Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Finland and Russia where the proportion of migrants is small, but welfare chauvinism is high; and the rest of the countries. Interestingly, in both Switzerland and Israel, more than a quarter of the population is foreign-born, but a substantially smaller proportion of Swiss respondents are explicitly critical about extending welfare rights to immigrants than it is the case in Israel.

Figure 9. Percentage of foreign-born population vs. percentage critical of social rights for immigrants



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

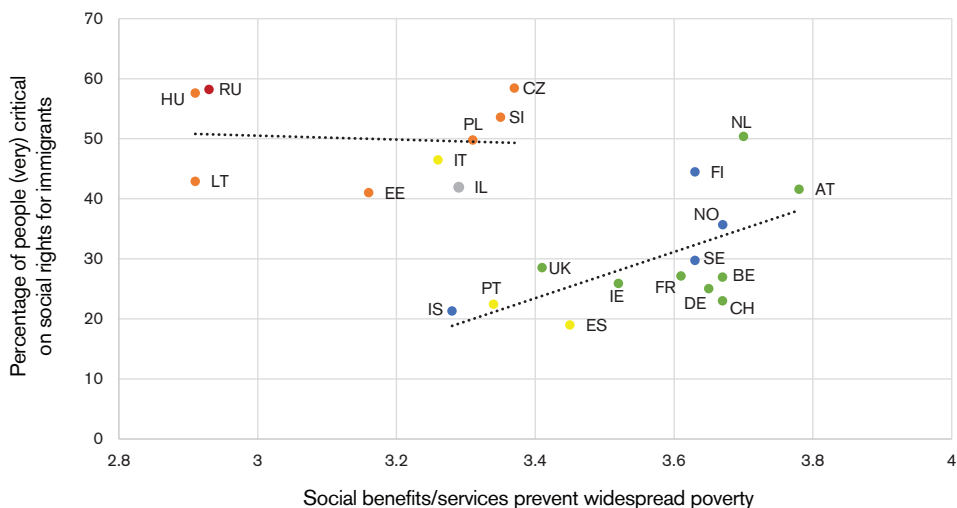
Notes: Respondents critical of social rights are those who answered that immigrants from other countries should 'never' or only after they 'have become a citizen' have access to the same social rights as citizens already living in the country. The correlation between the two variables is $r=-0.46$.

In Russia and Eastern Europe, welfare systems are not seen as effective and welfare chauvinism is high

According to the 'ethnic competition theory',⁸ welfare chauvinism might be explained as deriving from the fear of competition for scarce welfare resources. To test this, Figure 10 plots the proportion of people who are in favour of restricting migrants' access to social benefits against the average perceptions of how effective the country's social protection system

is in preventing widespread poverty. There certainly appears to be a link between the two, and the general picture indicates that people are more restrictive in countries where welfare systems are deemed to be less effective: mainly Eastern European countries and Russia. However, when looking at the old EU member states alone, a reverse tendency becomes visible, with respondents being somewhat more critical in countries where welfare systems are perceived to be more effective in preventing widespread poverty.

Figure 10. Evaluation of the effects of social policy on widespread poverty vs. the percentage critical of social rights for immigrants



Source: European Social Survey Round 8

Notes: Respondents critical of social rights are those who answered that immigrants from other countries should 'never' or only after they 'have become a citizen' have access to the same social rights as citizens already living in the country. Evaluation of poverty prevention was measured by answers to the statement: 'Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree that social benefits and services prevent widespread poverty'. Answers were measured on a 5-point scale (recoded here) ranging from 1 = 'disagree completely' to 5 = 'agree completely'. The correlation between the two variables when all countries are included is $r=0.46$. The correlation between the two variables for the 'old' EU member states (excluding Italy), Iceland, Norway and Switzerland (bottom right cluster in the figure) is $r=0.61$

Conclusion

The findings of the report allow us to draw some general conclusions regarding people's welfare attitudes in Russia and Europe. Despite the mounting challenges, the idea of the welfare state appears to be highly popular, with the majority of people in all ESS countries being strongly in favour of the redistribution principle and the key social protection programmes, including old-age provision, childcare services and to a lesser extent unemployment provision. Moreover, these attitudes hold even when people are sceptical about their government's ability to meet the objectives of the welfare state and when they doubt beneficiaries' work ethics. Against this background, the widespread welfare chauvinism is somewhat counterintuitive, which is particularly apparent in the Eastern European countries and several others. However, there are reasons to anticipate that opposition to migrants' social rights will diminish over time, as we find that people in countries with higher proportions of foreign-born citizens are the most receptive towards universal provision, irrespective of citizenship status.

The general support for the welfare state does not preclude the perceived need for reform, as evidenced by the high proportions of people supporting different scenarios for social policy reform: a universal basic income and activation of the unemployed. The turn to complete means testing of welfare provision seems to be the least popular of the three proposed options in most countries, presumably as it would exclude the middle and upper income groups. The idea of a basic income is not (yet) supported by the majority in most countries, conceivably due to uncertainty surrounding the effects this radical measure could entail. However, activation policies seem to have strong support in all countries. It is noticeable that the older age group favours complete means testing more than the younger age group does, while a basic

income is favoured more by the young even though the difference is not strong enough to change the preference structure in most countries. Thus, support for policy reform will most likely increase over time. However, a basic income is already the preferred social policy scheme today for people in Russia, Lithuania, Hungary and Slovenia. Except for Slovenia, these are the countries where people are most sceptical about the efficiency of the existing welfare system.

We also find that with regard to welfare opinions, countries often cluster in line with geographic regions, reflecting the fact that neighbouring countries tend to have similar levels of economic development and welfare systems. The least homogenous is the Eastern European group, presumably because in the last 30 years the social policy reforms have rendered these welfare systems more as hybrids of different European regimes, rather than as an idiosyncratic regime type.⁹

Russians' attitudes, while not radically different from those of Europeans, are nonetheless quite distinctive in some respects. In general, Russians appear to favour universal programmes, such as a universal basic income (everyone would be entitled to a basic income) or old-age pensions (everyone will get older), but they are considerably less supportive of programmes directed at specific needy people, such as the unemployed or working parents, while also being particularly restrictive of immigrants' social rights. At the same time, Russians are relatively sceptical about the capacities of their welfare system, as evidenced by the low satisfaction with the living standards of the unemployed and the achieved level of poverty reduction. This may help to understand why, unlike most European countries, each of the three proposed social policy schemes has the approval of more than half of Russia's population.

Endnotes

¹ See, e.g., Bonoli, G. (2005). The politics of new social policies: providing coverage against new social risks in mature welfare states. *Policy and Politics*, 33(3), 431–449.

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⁵ *European Social Survey Topline Results Issue 8: Welfare attitudes in Europe*

⁶ Reeskens, T., and van Oorschot, W. (2012). Disentangling the ‘New Liberal Dilemma’: On the relation between general welfare redistribution preferences and welfare chauvinism. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. 53(2), 120–139

⁷ Cappelens, C., and Peters, Y. (2018). The impact of intra-EU migration on welfare chauvinism. *Journal of Public Policy*, 38(3), 389–417.

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⁸ Olzak, S. (1992). *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

⁹ Hacker, B. (2009). Hybridization instead of clustering: Transformation processes of welfare policies in Central and Eastern Europe. *Social Policy and Administration*. 43(2), 152–169.

About the ESS

ESS is an academically-driven survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2002. Its dataset contains the results of 381,351 completed interviews undertaken every two years with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations.

The European Social Survey has been a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) since 2013. It continues to provide freely available cross-national data about public attitudes and behaviour over time.

ESS topics:

- Trust in institutions
- Political engagement
- Socio-political values
- Moral and social values
- Social capital
- Social exclusion
- National, ethnic and religious identity
- Wellbeing, health and security
- Demographic composition
- Education and occupation
- Financial circumstances
- Household circumstances
- Attitudes to welfare
- Trust in criminal justice
- Expressions and experiences of ageism
- Citizenship, involvement and democracy
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23 countries participated in Round 8 of the ESS, fielded in 2016/17.

Members:

Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK

Observer:

Switzerland

Other Participants:

Finland, Iceland, Israel, Russia and Spain

Multi-national advisory groups to the ESS ERIC General Assembly are the Methods Advisory Board (MAB), Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and Finance Committee (FINCOM).

The ESS ERIC Headquarters are located at City, University of London.

The ESS ERIC Core Scientific Team includes: GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Germany); Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium); NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Norway); SCP - The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Netherlands); Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain); University of Essex (UK); and University of Ljubljana (Slovenia).

The National Coordinators' (NC) Forum involves national teams from all participating countries.

