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Statistics

in focus

**POPULATION AND
SOCIAL CONDITIONS**

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Monetary poverty in new Member States and Candidate Countries

Common indicators for social inclusion

At the Laeken European Council in December 2001, European Union (EU) Heads of State and Government endorsed a first set of 18 common statistical indicators of social exclusion and poverty. Indicators are an essential element in the Open Method of Co-ordination to monitor progress of Member States in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. A selection of the 18 Laeken indicators is also used as structural indicators by the European Commission in its Synthesis Report to the Spring European Council meeting, ensuring thereby full consistency between the different processes.

To highlight the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon of social exclusion, the indicators cover four important areas: financial poverty, employment, health and education. The present report provides an overview of the indicators relating to monetary aspects of poverty, as calculated for new Member States and Candidate Countries on the basis of national statistical sources. Since the Laeken European Council, the Indicators Sub-Group of the EU Social Protection Committee has continued working with a view to refining and consolidating the original list of indicators. The revised list of commonly agreed monetary indicators together with their definition is provided in the methodological notes. An equivalent report gives the same overview for the member states and more information on the political background.

Comparability of indicators between EU15 countries, new Member States and Candidate Countries

The methodology used to calculate the indicators for new Member States and Candidate Countries is, as far as possible, the same as the one used for EU15 Member States. In particular, every effort has been made to ensure that definitions are as comparable as possible to the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) definition, which to date is the sole common source at EU level for comparative data on income and living conditions.

However, due to the absence of a common data source for those countries, indicators for the new Member States and Candidate Countries cannot be considered to be fully comparable amongst themselves nor with EU15 figures.

Please note also that discussions are ongoing with the Slovak Institute of Statistics concerning the quality of the data used. Indicators for Slovakia have therefore to be considered as provisional.

Even though these various methodological issues need to be kept in mind, the indicators presented in this paper provide valuable comparative information on poverty and social exclusion for new Member States and Candidate Countries. They are the results of a close cooperation between new Member States and Candidate Countries' national statistical institutes and Eurostat.

For all the indicators in the current paper, the NMS10 mean is a weighted average of national results related to the 10 new Member States, where each country receives a weight that equals its total population.

Results for the three Candidate Countries (Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey) are also presented, together with their CC3 weighted average and the EU15 and EU25 averages. Although 2001 is the reference year for most of the countries, there are some exceptions (i.e. Cyprus (1997), Latvia and Turkey (2002), Malta (2000), Slovakia and Turkey (2003)).

Population at-risk-of poverty

Figure 1 shows the proportion of the population who were at risk of poverty in each country in 2001, i.e. living in households with an "equivalised disposable income" (see methodological notes) below 60% of the national median equivalised income. New Member States and Candidate Countries and EU15 Member States (on average) show a very similar performance in terms of exposure to poverty risk. Apart from the extreme positions occupied by the Czech Republic (8%), Slovakia (21%) and Turkey (23%), values range from 10% (Hungary) to 18% (Estonia).
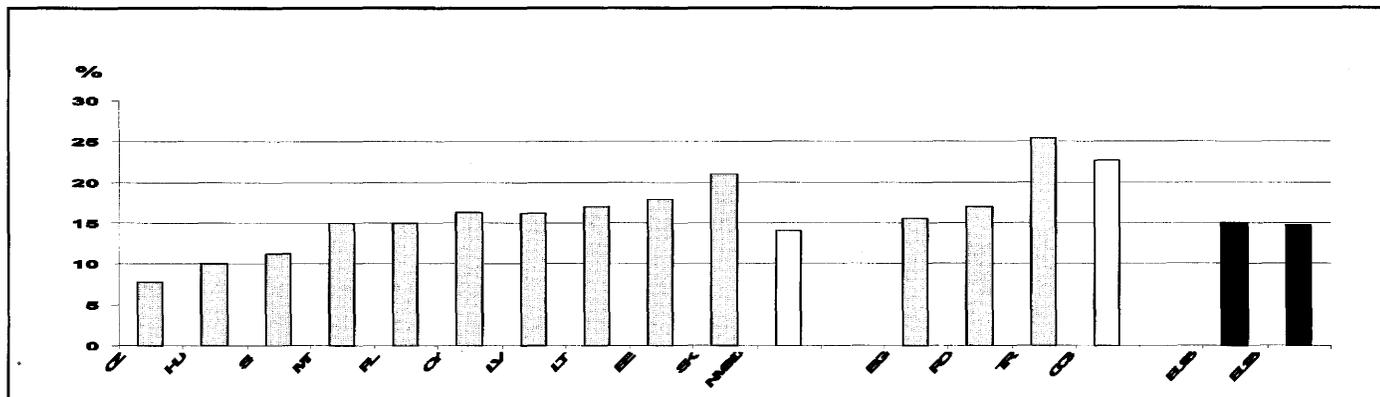

Figure 1: At-risk-of-poverty rate, total population, 2001

Poverty is measured as a relative concept

The "at-risk-of-poverty threshold" is fixed, for each country, at 60% of the national median equivalised income. The focus is therefore on the relative rather than absolute risk of poverty: an absolute notion is less relevant for the EU for two main reasons. First, the key challenge for Europe is to make the whole population share the benefits of high average prosperity, and not to reach basic standards of living, as in less developed parts of the world. Secondly, what is regarded as minimal acceptable living standards depends largely on the general level of social and economic development, which tends to vary considerably across countries.

However, this method needs to be used with caution when comparing national poverty and social exclusion results in the context of the enlarged Union. Generally, the level of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in PPS in new Member States and Candidate Countries is very low compared to the EU average (see Figure 2), whereas their distribution of income is relatively narrow. This can almost certainly be explained by historical circumstances (income distribution policies in socialist economies and the different evolutions following liberalisation), by difficulties in capturing information about income from the hidden economy; and by the fact that extreme incomes (very poor or very rich people) are often misrepresented in the surveys.

This emphasises the need to use several indicators in conjunction to be able to draw a correct picture of poverty and social exclusion in a given country.

The comparative analysis of the national thresholds helps to illustrate the different level of economic well-being across countries and is particularly important in the context of an enlarged Union (even again if it should be kept in mind that different reference year can influence the results). National thresholds are computed for the population as a whole and are expressed in terms of equivalised income to take account of household size and composition. For a given household type, a national threshold can then be converted from "equivalised" into "unequivalised" money by multiplying it by the "equivalent size" of that household. For a single-person household, the "equivalised" national threshold is multiplied by 1. For a 2 adults-2 children household, the "equivalised" national threshold is multiplied by 2.1 (i.e. the equivalent size of such an household: 1.0+0.5+(2*0.3) = 2.1). Figure 2 shows the annual monetary value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for a single-person household, in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS, see methodological notes) and for each country, as well as for the EU15, EU25, NMS10 and CC3 means.

For all Candidate and new Member States Countries, the difference between the national threshold and the EU one (with the latter being the weighted mean of the EU countries' national values) is quite large, as national threshold values range from 14% of the EU-average in Romania to 76% in Slovenia and 80% in Cyprus (1997 data for Cyprus).
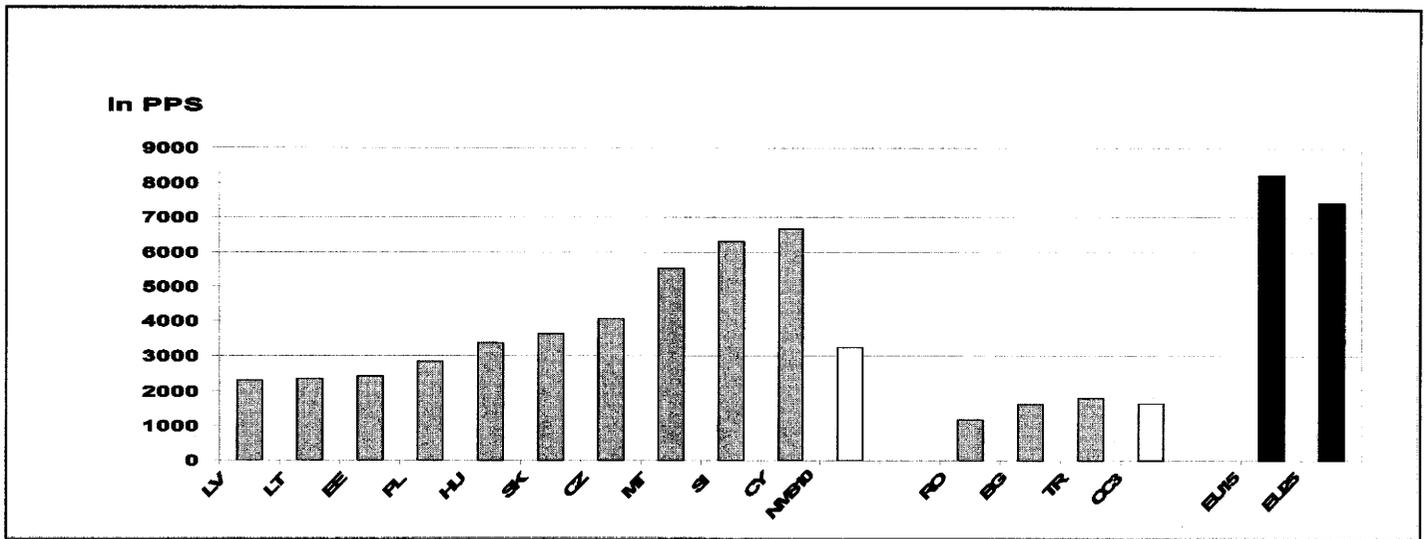
Figure 2: At-risk-of-poverty threshold, single person, 2001

The depth of poverty

The choice of 60% of national median equivalised income as the threshold is conventional, although statistical considerations have guided this selection. To examine the sensitivity of the risk of poverty to the choice of alternative thresholds, three additional thresholds have also been retained in Laeken: 40%, 50% and 70% of median equivalised income (Figure 3).
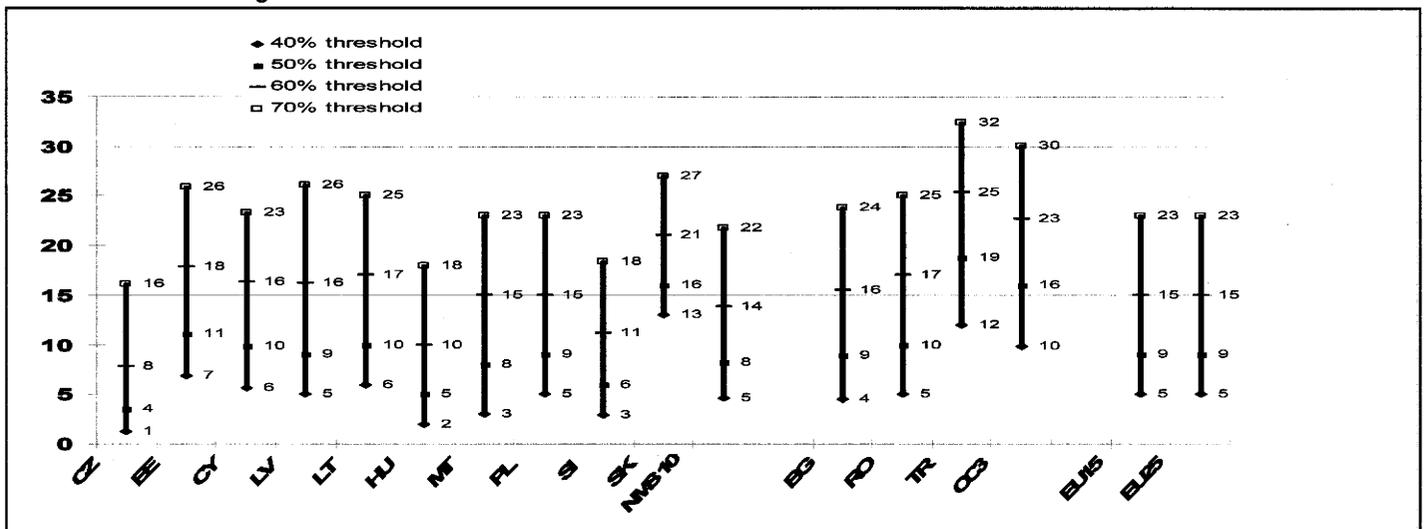

Figure 3: Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, total population, 2001

At the NMS10 average level, the likelihood of being at risk of poverty varied in 2001 from 5% to 22% for thresholds set at 40% and 70% of the median respectively; it was 8% if a 50% cut-off is employed. This gives a first insight into the depth of poverty risk. One Laeken indicator that explicitly measures how far below the threshold the income of people at risk of poverty is, i.e. "how poor the poor are", is the at-risk-of-poverty gap. In 2001 the median gap (i.e. the difference between the 60% threshold and the median equivalised income of the poor), expressed as a percentage of this threshold, was 21% at NMS level. In other words, half of those at-risk-of-poverty had an equivalised income below 79% of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (or below 79%*60%=47.4% of median equivalised income). The gap was higher in Slovakia, Estonia and Cyprus. Among Candidate Countries, Romania and Bulgaria have a gap close to the EU mean, whereas Turkey's is higher than NMS10 and EU means (Figure 4).
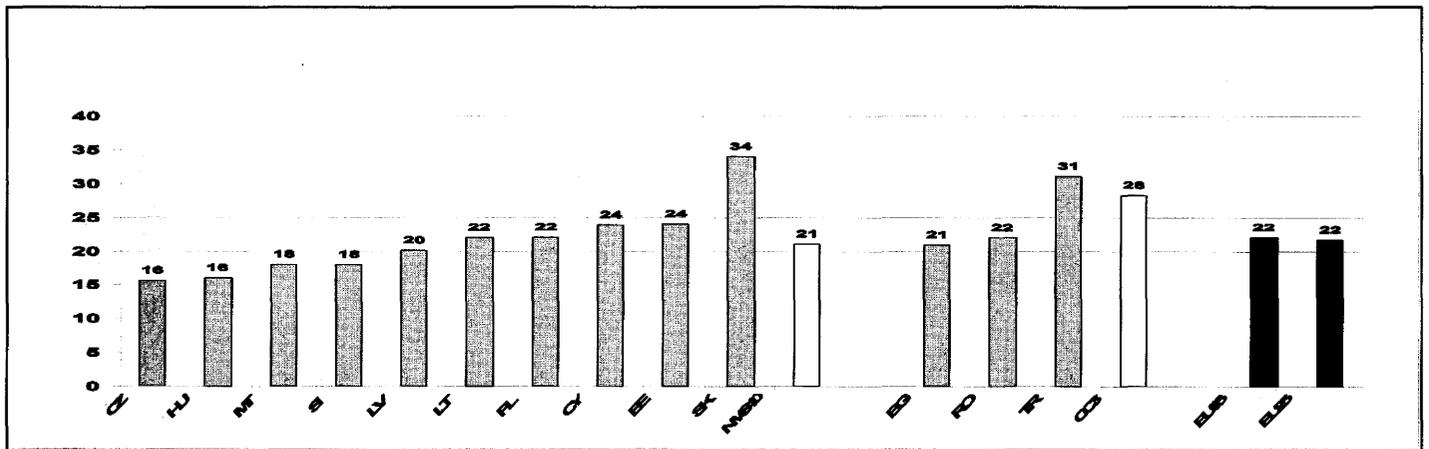
Figure 4: Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap, total population, 2001

Incidence of poverty risk by individual characteristics

The examination of the detailed Laeken breakdowns offers information on the magnitude of poverty risk that different subpopulations have to face. Various breakdowns for the NMS10 average are presented in Figure 5 (additional gender breakdowns are available on Eurostat new Cronos site, theme 3, domain ILC or from the authors on request. Except for single person households, gender difference in poverty risk need to be interpreted with caution, since they rely on the assumption of equal sharing of income within the household.)

At the NMS10 mean level, the most vulnerable groups are: children 0-15 years (1.4 times the poverty risk for the total population); people aged 16-24 years (1.2); unemployed (2.6); single males (1.3); single parents (1.6); families with more than 3 children (2); and tenants (1.2).

This pattern is consistent across all new Member States, except in Cyprus and to a lesser extent in Malta and

Slovenia where the age curve has an opposite shape: youngest people are in a better position than the total population and the elderly face higher poverty risks (in Cyprus, for example, poverty risk of the elderly is 3.5 times the risk for the total population). This is comparable to the EU15 situation.

However, it must be kept in mind that the analysis of the income situation of the population, particularly by age or by tenure status, can suffer from the fact that the data source used to calculate income poverty rates takes no account of imputed rent, i.e., the money that one saves on rent by living in one's own accommodation. This is likely to result in underestimated living standards of older households, who are generally more likely to be living in their own accommodation than younger households. All this will also tend to affect comparisons of the overall poverty risk across countries, as long as the share of owner-occupiers in the total number of people at risk of poverty varies a lot across countries.
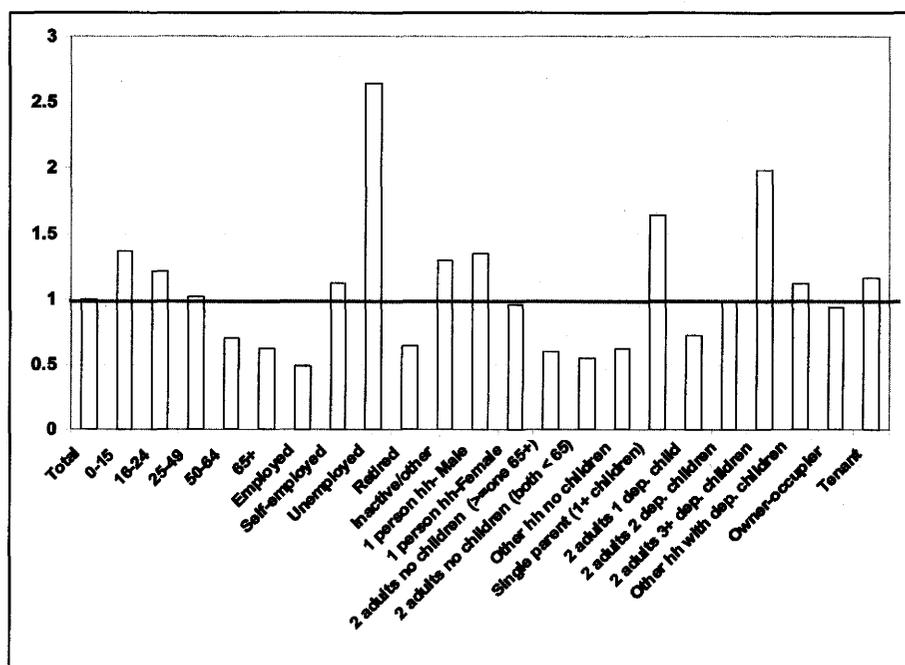

Figure 5: Breakdowns of poverty risk, expressed in % of poverty risk for total population, NMS10, 2001

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Inequality of income distribution

The focus of all the indicators presented so far is on the bottom part of the income distribution. It can also be interesting to look at the overall income distribution. This can be illustrated by the S80/S20 ratio. For each country, this ratio compares the total equivalised income received by the top income quintile (20% of the population with the highest equivalised income) to that received by the bottom income quintile (20% with lowest equivalised income).

While the S80/S20 ratio is only responsive to changes in top and bottom quintiles, the Gini coefficient allows taking into account the full distribution of income. If there was perfect equality (i.e. each person receives the same income), the Gini coefficient would be 0%; it would be 100% if the entire national income were in the hands of only one person.

The rankings of national Gini coefficients and S80/S20 ratios are quite similar, as can be seen in Figure 6.
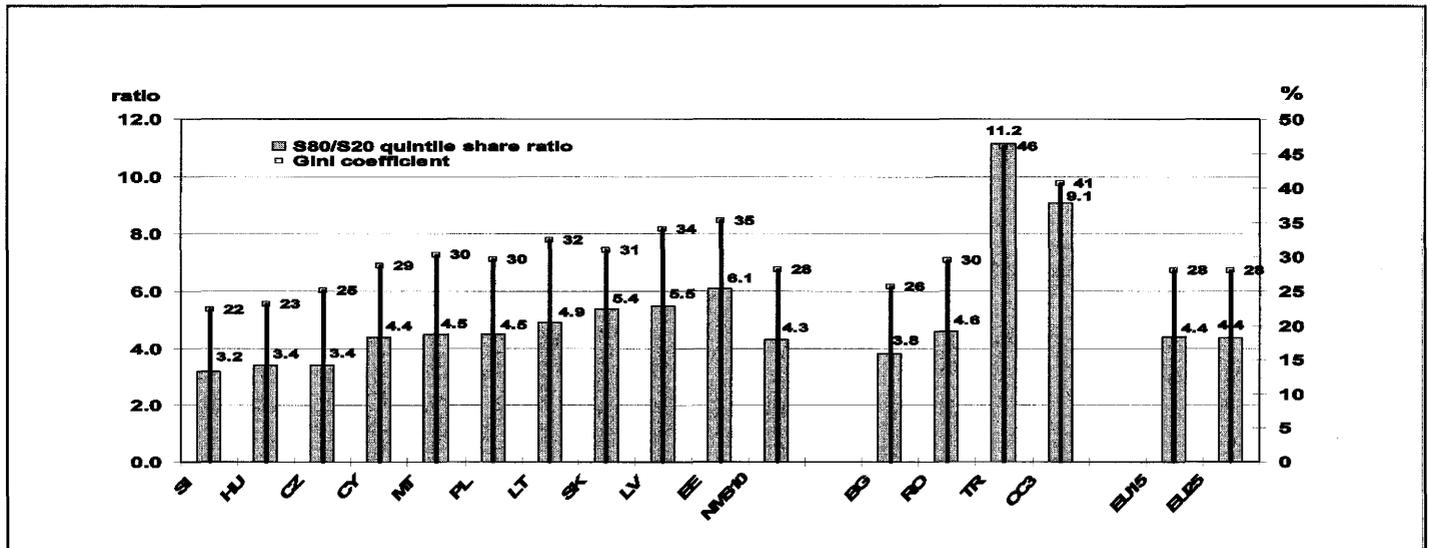

Figure 6: S80/S20 income quintile share ratio and Gini coefficient, total population, 2001

Due to the relative narrowness of the income distribution, most new Member States and Candidate Countries have a S80/S20 ratio and a Gini coefficient that is close to the EU-15 mean, or even lower. In 2001, the mean S80/S20 ratio for the ten new Member States Countries for which data are available was 4.3, which means that the wealthiest quintile had 4.3 times more income than the poorest. The values ranged from 3.2 in Slovenia to 6.1 in Estonia. The mean Gini coefficient for the NMS10 was 28%, with national values varying between 22% (Slovenia) and 35% (Estonia). Among the Candidate Countries, Turkey had by far the least equal distribution, as the S80/S20 attained 11.2 and its Gini coefficient 46%.

Re-distributive effect of social transfers

One important methodological principle for the selection of the commonly agreed indicators is that they must measure social outcomes rather than the means by which they are achieved. This is in line with the very nature of the open method of co-ordination, whereby Member States agree on objectives but are left free to choose the policies by which these objectives are to be met. Furthermore, an indicator that measures policy effort is of little help if there is no way of knowing whether the effort is achieving its goal. The indicator of *at-risk of poverty rate before social cash transfers* is not strictly following this rule given that, when compared to the poverty risk rate after social transfers, it can be seen as an *input* rather than *output indicator* (i.e. it aims at measuring the impact of national social transfers in reducing poverty risks).

A comparison between the standard at-risk-of-poverty rate and the hypothetical situation where social transfers are absent *ceteris paribus* shows that such transfers have an important re-distributive effect. Figure 7 compares the different at-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers for all the new Member States and Candidate Countries in 2001. In each country, these rates are calculated with the same threshold, namely the nationally-defined 60% threshold calculated on the basis of total household income, i.e. including all social transfers.

An analysis of social transfers obviously goes beyond the scope of this note, but Figure 7 shows that in the absence of all social transfers, the average poverty risk for new Member States would be considerably higher than it is in reality (average rate of 44% instead of 14%). For the EU15 as a whole, the indicator would rise from 15% to 39%. It can be argued that the prime role of old age (and survivors') pensions is not to re-distribute income across individuals but rather over the life-cycle of individuals. If, therefore, pensions are considered as primary income rather than social transfers, the at-risk-of-poverty rate without all other social transfers is 26% for NMS10 (24% for the EU). The at-risk-of-poverty rate before all social transfers is very low in Cyprus. For a rate after transfers comparable to the EU, the rate before all transfers is far lower in Cyprus than in the EU. The same pattern is also true for Turkey, even if the risk of poverty rate is quite higher. For all other Candidate Countries and new Member States, the effect of social transfers is important and decreases substantially the level of poverty risk.
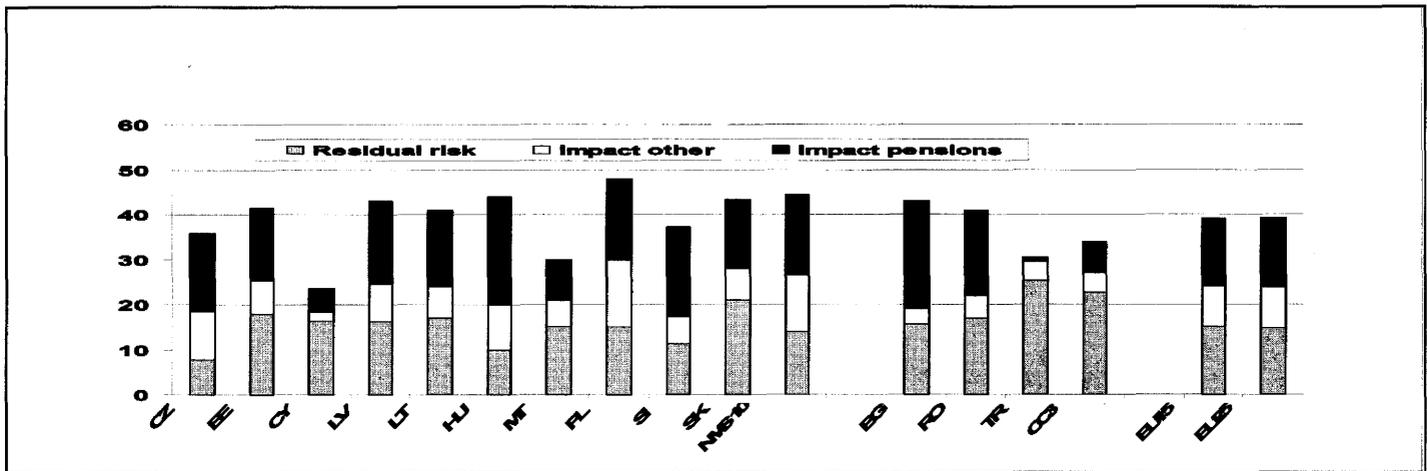
Figure 7: Impact of social transfers on the at-risk-of-poverty rate, total population, 2001

Impact of the equivalence scale

In the indicators presented so far, the household income is equivalised using the so-called "modified OECD" equivalence scale. This scale gives a weight of 1.0 to the first adult, 0.5 to any other household member aged 14 and over and 0.3 to each child. The resulting equivalised income is attributed to each member of the household, whether adult or children.

At the EU level, the modified OECD scale replaced the original OECD scale which had been used in the past and

was known as the Oxford scale. In the original OECD scale the first adult person receives a weight of 1.0, any additional adult 0.7, while children 0.5. The change of scale resulted first of all from the decreasing proportion of food expenditure in the household budgets. The increasing share of other expenditures in the total consumption implied more economies of scales (i.e. food expenditures are growing proportionally more than housing cost, for example, when the number of persons in a household increases). The decision was taken in collaboration with member states, formalised at political level in 1998 and reconfirmed in Laeken in 2001.
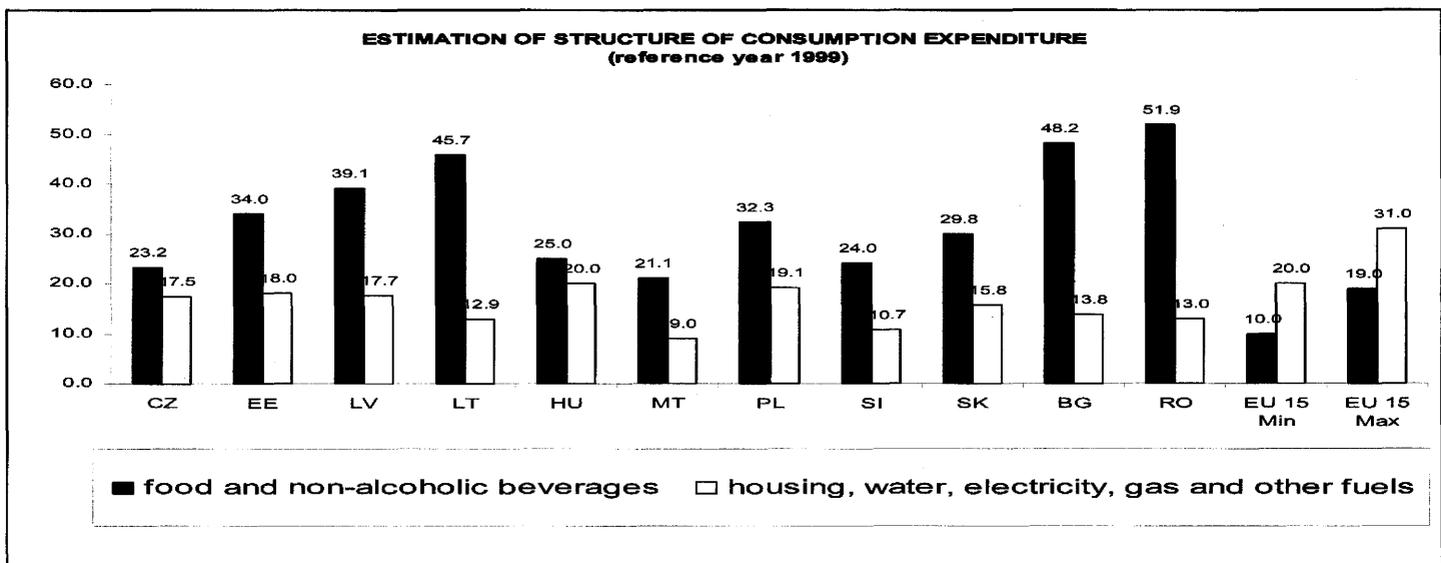

Figure 8: Share of food and housing costs in total consumption, total population, 1999

With the accession of new Member States, the question arises whether the differences in the consumption structure between EU15 Member States on the one hand and the new Member States or Candidate Countries on the other (see figure 8, for the noticeable differences in the share of total expenditure accounted for by food and housing costs between the two groups of countries) significantly influence the accuracy of conclusions which can be drawn on the basis of the current equivalisation methodology. In order to evaluate the impact of the

equivalence scale used, Laeken indicators were computed using both scales (original and modified OECD scales). The main conclusion of this exercise is that the value of the indicators for the *total* population is very weakly influenced by the choice of scale (and not always in the same direction); both in terms of poverty risk and inequality (see Figures 9 and 10).
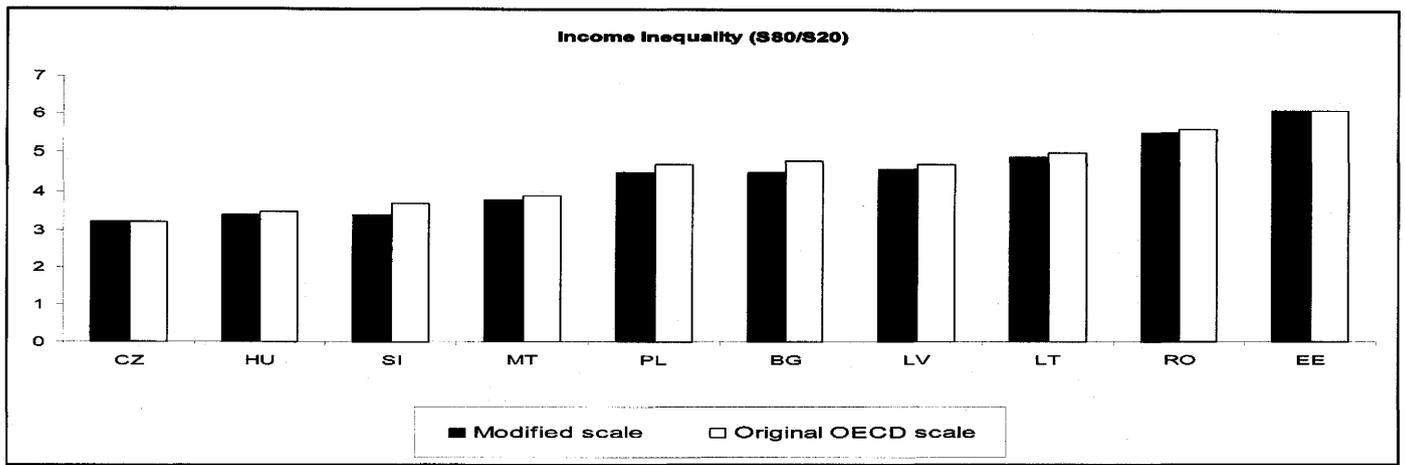
Figure 9: S80/S20 income quintile share ratio, modified and original OECD scales, total population, 2001
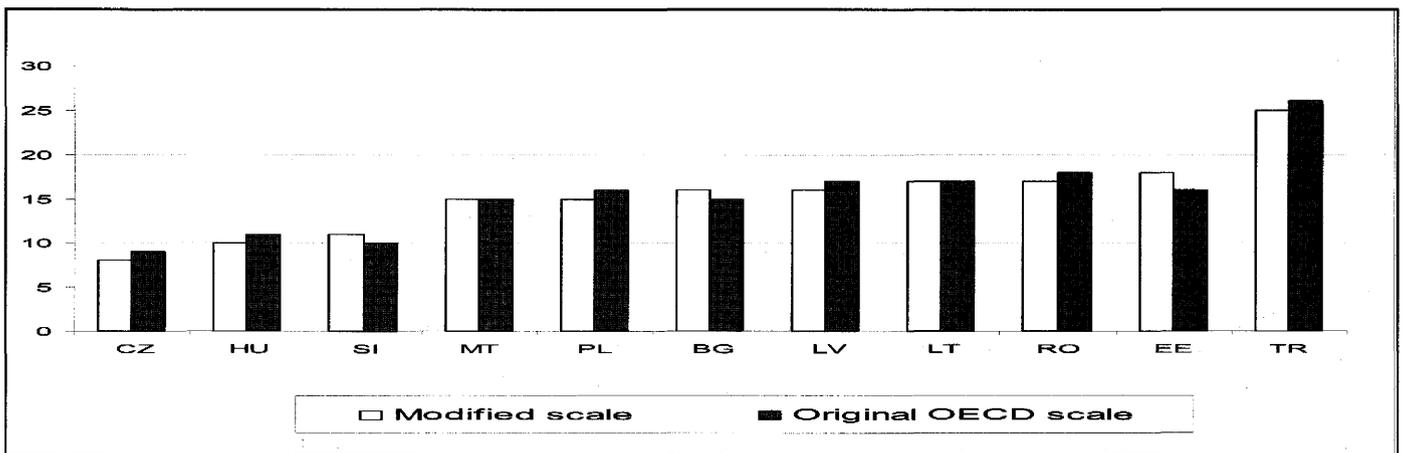

Figure 10: At-risk-of poverty rate, modified and original OECD scales, total population, 2001

However, the impact of the choice of equivalence scale for poverty measurement becomes obvious when we take into account demographic characteristics. Not surprisingly, given the way it is constructed, the influence of the equivalence scale on at-risk-of-poverty rates is most clearly observed in the analysis according to the age of persons and type of household (see figure 11 and 12).
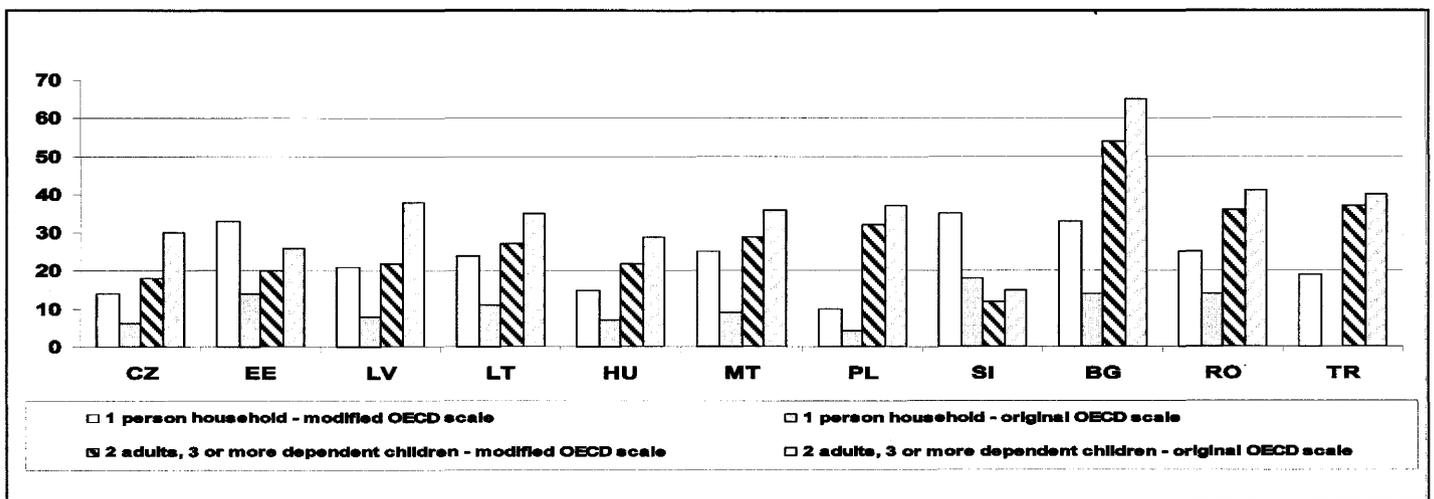

Figure 11: At-risk-of poverty rate by age, modified and original OECD scales, total population, 2001
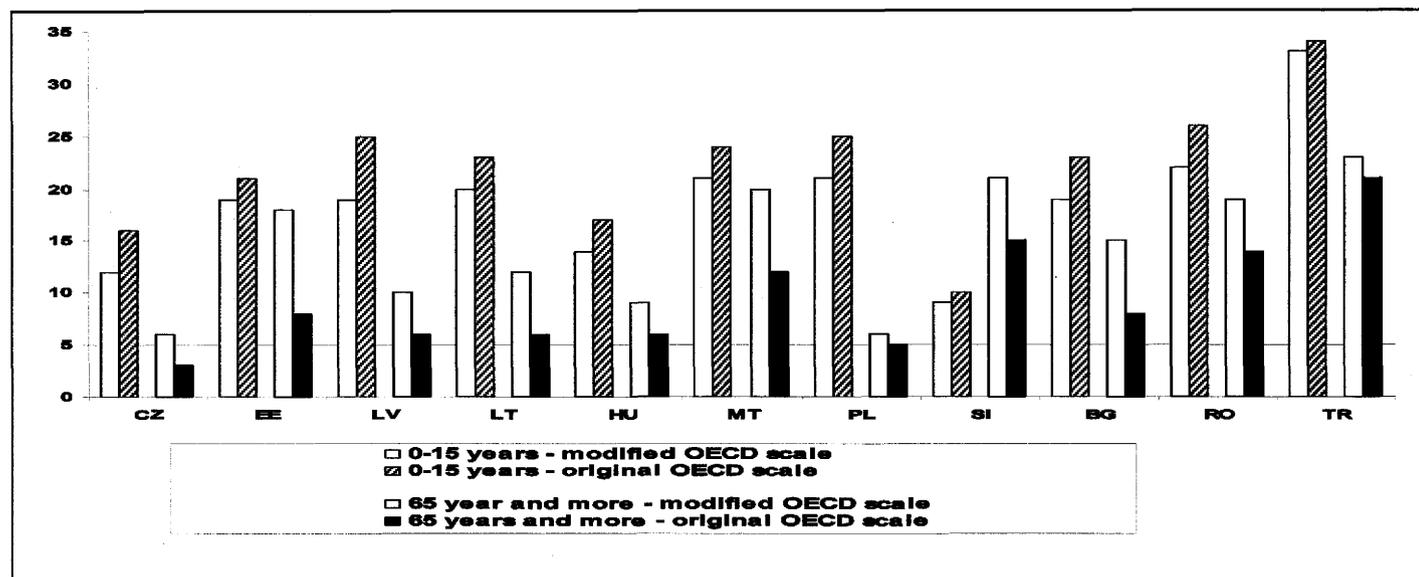
Figure 12:At-risk-of poverty rate by age, modified and original OECD scales, total population, 2001

The difference is especially noticeable for 1-person households and large families. Using the modified OECD scale at-risk-of poverty rates for 1-person households are twice as high as with the use of the original scale (from 1.8 times in Romania to 2.8 times in Malta). In the case of couples with at least 3 children the incidence of poverty risk is much higher with the original OECD scale (from about 1.1 times in Slovenia to 1.7 times in Lithuania). Attributing a greater weight to children in the original scale makes the at-risk-of poverty rate for children at the age of 0-15 years about 1.1-1.3 times higher than with the modified scale, and conversely using the original scale clearly reduces poverty rates for elderly people at the age of 65 and over. This implies a reduction of the at-risk-of poverty rate for the retired subpopulation as well. Reaching an agreement on the most appropriate equivalence scale to be used in all countries of the enlarged EU is not an easy task given the different impact this choice can have in the different countries - not so much on the level but rather on the composition of poverty. In view of the decisions reached in 1998 and 2001 (see above), countries may wish to stick to the current agreement and show, if and when required, the impact on national results of the use of different scales (including nationally-defined scales). For specific detailed investigation, the best national data for the task might also dictate using the most adequate scale.

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➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The present publication focused on the Laeken indicators of monetary poverty (see definitions in table below) in new Member States and Candidate Countries. Indicators in this report were only provided at the level of the total population and for 1999, when possible. The full series of data with the breakdowns agreed in Laeken (by age and gender, activity status, household type and tenure status) can be found on the Eurostat new Cronos website, theme 3, domain ILC.

Definitions of revised list of the Commonly agreed Indicator

Indicator	Definition
At-risk-of poverty rate	Share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below 60% of the national equivalised median income. Equivalised median income is defined as the household's total disposable income divided by its "equivalent size", to take account of the size and composition of the household, and is attributed to each household member. Breakdowns by age and gender, household type, work intensity of households, most frequent activity status, accommodation tenure status.
At-risk-of-poverty threshold (illustrative values)	The value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% median national equivalised income) in PPS, Euro and national currency for two illustrative household types: - Single person household - Household with 2 adults, two children
Income quintile ratio (S80/S20)	Ratio of total income received by the 20% of the country's population with the highest income (top quintile) to that received by the 20% of the country's population with the lowest income (lowest quintile). Income must be understood as equivalised disposable income.
Persistent at-risk-of poverty rate	Share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in the current year and in at least two of the preceding three years.
Relative median poverty risk gap	Difference between the median equivalised income of persons below the at-risk-of poverty threshold and the threshold itself, expressed as a percentage of the at-risk-of poverty threshold.
Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold	Share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below 40%, 50% and 70% of the national equivalised median income.
At-risk-of-poverty rate anchored at a moment in time	In year t, share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in year t-3, uprated by inflation over the three years.
At-risk-of-poverty rate before social cash transfers	Relative at-risk-of-poverty rate where equivalised income is calculated as follows: - excluding all social cash transfers - including retirement and survivors pensions and excluding all other social cash transfers. - including all social cash transfers (= indicator 1) The same at-risk-of-poverty threshold is used for the three statistics, and is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social cash transfers).
Gini coefficient	Summary measure of the cumulative share of equivalised income accounted for by the cumulative percentages of the number of individuals. Its value ranges from 0% (complete equality) to 100% (complete inequality).
Persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate (50% of median equivalised income)	Share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below 50% of the national median equivalised income in the current year and in at least two of the preceding three years.
In-work poverty risk	Individuals who are classified as employed (distinguishing between wage and salary employment and self-employment) according to the definition of most frequent activity status (indicator 1) and who are at risk of poverty. This indicator needs to be analysed according to personal, job and household characteristics.

Due to the missing longitudinal dimension in the underlying data sources, persistent risk-of-poverty rates could not be calculated for any new Member State and Candidate Country.

Data used

Figures presented in this publication come from National Surveys for Candidate Countries and new Member States and, for the EU mean, from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) users' database, version of December 2003 (wave 8 conducted in 2001). The table presents the different sources.

Country	Source
Bulgaria	Household Budget Survey (HBS) 2001
Cyprus	Family expenditure survey 1997
Czech Republic	Survey on Social Situation of the Household 2001
Estonia	HBS 2001
Hungary	HBS 2000, HBS 2001
Latvia	HBS 2002
Lithuania	HBS 2001
Malta	HBS 2000
Poland	HBS 2001
Romania	HBS 2001
Slovakia	Microcensus 2003
Slovenia	HBS 2001
Turkey	Household Income and Consumption Expenditure Survey 2002

Income definition

For the EU Countries, household total disposable income as measured in the ECHP is taken to be all net monetary income received by the household and its members during the income reference year (i.e. the calendar year preceding the survey interview) – namely all income from work (employee wages and self-employment earnings), private income from investment and property, plus all social transfers received directly including old-age pensions, net of any taxes and social contributions paid. However, no account is taken of indirect social transfers, loan interest payments, transfer payments to other households, and imputed rent for owner-occupied accommodation.

For new Member States and Candidate Countries, the information collected in the various national data sources differs in some respects. In order to approximate as closely as possible to the ECHP income definition, components such as the following were excluded from the total household income: lottery winnings, insurance claim receipts, non-regular gifts (although regular transfers received from other households were included), all transfers paid to other households, revenue from sales of property (for example houses or cars). The impact of these adjustments on reported values can sometimes be significant by comparison with the national income definitions used in these countries.

Furthermore, for new Member States and Candidate Countries, income-in-kind is included in the total income definition, as it is considered to be a more substantial component of the disposable income for these countries than is the case for EU15 Member States, meaning that its exclusion would have significantly underestimated the actual situation. 'Income-in-kind' covers goods produced directly by the household through either a private or a professional activity (e.g. own production of food from farming household or a household whose leisure activity is connected with agriculture; products from hunting or fishing; withdrawals from stocks by tradespeople, etc.). Services obtained free of charge as part of a professional activity are also classified as 'benefits in kind' (e.g. provision of housing, company vehicle, crèche facilities, free meals at work, etc.). It is worth emphasising that collecting information regarding 'income-in-kind' involves a number of difficulties, due to the different methods of identifying it and estimating 'income-in-kind' values, and due to the different relative importance of this income in the different countries (as well as within countries). These components were not included in the ECHP. As far as the future is concerned, only the value of company cars for private use is to be included from the beginning in the new instrument EU-SILC; other elements (e.g. imputed rent and self consumption) will become mandatory from 2007. It must be highlighted that self-employment income is acknowledged to be difficult to collect, whatever the data source. And last but not least, it must be kept in mind that the difficulty to capture income from the hidden economy can introduce bias in the income distribution measured through surveys.

Once total household income is collected, the figures are given per "equivalent adult", in order to reflect differences in household size and composition. In other words, the total household income is divided by its equivalent size using the so-called "modified OECD" equivalence scale. This scale gives a weight of 1.0 to the first adult, 0.5 to any other household member aged 14 and over and 0.3 to each child. The resulting figure is attributed to each member of the household, whether adult or children. The equivalent size of a household that consists of 2 adults and 2 children below the age of 14 is therefore: 1.0+0.5+(2*0.3) = 2.1.

Time reference period

Surveys can have different income reference periods (e.g. Monthly vs. yearly, last 12 months vs. previous calendar year, etc.), which may have an impact inter alia on the value of the data and their comparability between countries. Furthermore, within a country, the income variable may not be fully comparable between sub-samples if the survey is conducted at different periods of the year (i.e. in continuous surveys for which the income reference period is the current one). In this case, the income distribution (and the results in terms of poverty risk) can be biased by the variability of seasonal income components (such as income from agriculture, self-employment, thirteenth and fourteenth month payment).

Another factor that can affect the comparability of the results is the fact that, although 2001 is currently the reference year for most of the countries, there are some exceptions due to the periodic nature of the data source in the countries concerned (i.e. Cyprus (1997), Latvia and Turkey (2002), Malta (2000), Slovakia (2003)).

Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) and Purchasing Power Standards (PPS)

PPP are a fictitious currency exchange rate, which eliminate the impact of price level differences across countries. Thus 1 PPS will buy a comparable basket of goods and services in each country. For ease of understanding they are scaled at EU level.

The detailed methodology of the monetary Laeken indicators presented in this publication is available on the Eurostat CIRCA website or from the authors on request.

Further information:

➢ **Databases**

NewCronos, Theme 3

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