

Lluís Flaquer

Causes underlying the growth of child poverty and strategies to combat it: A comparative perspective

The abolition or minimisation of child poverty can be predicated on moral, legal and economic grounds. The growth of child poverty causes strong moral indignation among sensitive sectors of the European population, given that children are more vulnerable than adults and are fully dependent upon them. International agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child approved by nearly all states throughout the world define children as citizens with entitlements to rights; clearly, some of these very rights are harshly violated by severe poverty. Finally, a child-centred social-investment strategy conjoining private gains and public utilities can be posited for the sake of economic efficiency within a knowledge-based society in which life chances increasingly depend on cultural, social and cognitive capital and in which, in turn, these are particularly developed in childhood.

The causes for the emergence of child poverty are complex. Some of these have to do with widespread processes that have altered crucial aspects of the national economies, including the restructuring of labour markets as a result of globalisation and the shift in relative demand for skilled and unskilled labour due to technological innovation; others are associated with mutations in the social structure of advanced modern societies relative to partnership and marriage markets in connection with the impact of educational expansion; additionally, one of the main factors underlying the growth of child poverty is the failure of welfare-reform response to the transition from the male-breadwinner family model towards that of the dual-earner.

Finally, this paper reviews different strategies for dealing with child poverty. A distinction is made between preventive vs. remedial as well as public vs. private strategies, and a number of particular approaches are discussed. These include long-term investment in children, the remarriage and cohabitation of single mothers, the formation of complex households, income from non-resident fathers, activation measures in women's paid work, and child benefit packages. These strategies are illustrated by means of specific examples from EU countries.

Lluís Flaquer

Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Institute of Childhood and Urban World (CIIMU), Spain

e-mail: lluis.flaquer@uab.es