

Part IV

The Western Region

The West European approach to poverty research is notable for its concern with the conceptualization of poverty. Significant for the long run of poverty research and policy is the development of less economic measures of poverty. The subjective poverty line, for example, is based on public opinion surveys of what is considered an inadequate income; deprivation indices measure deficiencies in health, housing, education, etc.; while the broader concern for social exclusion focuses on participation of all citizens in the community. In general, poverty researchers in Western Europe regard poverty as linked to inequality, not just to subsistence. The language of social inclusion is becoming important in policy circles.

Poverty research has had a shorter and more restricted role in the authoritarian Europe of the Soviet Union and the former East European nations in the Soviet orbit. Poverty research was banned, discouraged or limited, and certainly under-researched compared with the West. In the post-1989 and post-1991 period, the impact of a narrow conceptualization of poverty is still visible in the minimum-subsistence approach to poverty measurement and alleviation in the East Central and the former Soviet Union nations. They are now late-comers both to poverty research and to high poverty rates.

The Western region is experiencing economic difficulties that affect social policies. In Eastern Europe, the break-up of communist rule has resulted in the uncertainties of the market, inflation, and high unemployment as well as in new economic growth. Enterprise-based social policies – a staple of the previous regimes – have deteriorated and the social policies left over from the past are not coping well with the new situations.

Economic strains are forcing a re-evaluation of some of the social policies of Scandinavia and Canada. The welfare state in these countries has provided a model, perhaps a yardstick, for assessing poverty policy. Universalistic social programmes providing an income floor and extensive social services are the

cornerstone of the welfare state model. As in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, social policy was based on a full employment economy and limited inflation, and political consensus made possible high taxes and high public transfers. Now, these conditions for a strong welfare state have changed, and poverty is re-emerging. In Scandinavia and in many of the other high-income countries in the Western region, the *rediscovery* of poverty is the theme. The new economic conditions force the awareness that poverty is a problem again, and that poverty research is needed. Large-scale research programmes on poverty have been launched, as for example on the urban underclass in the United States and on social exclusion in the European Community.