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- Parallel session 6B: Well-Being across Time and Space
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Title: Cross-national comparisons of multidimensional child poverty in the European Union; puzzling with the few pieces that the EU-SILC provides

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Extended abstract:

This paper links up with two active strands of academic research in the area of poverty measurement. Firstly, the degree to which monetary and multidimensional poverty approaches both capture a similar groups of individuals. A larger or smaller degree of overlap between these groups of poor individuals seems to be as much a result of underlying conceptual and methodological choices as it is of implementation choices (i.e. selecting data, indicators and thresholds). Secondly, in the recent years there has been widespread acknowledgement in both academic and policy circles that children deserve a special focus in poverty measurement. The European Union, for instance, has acknowledged the need of having child specific indicators in monitoring poverty and social exclusion but thus far not much progress has been made to develop, test and compare indicators of child well being across member states.

In this paper we take an axiomatic approach to the measurement of monetary and multidimensional poverty with the aim to analyze the degree of overlap for groups of children captured by monetary and multidimensional poverty measures. Using the cross-sectional data from the 2007 EU-SILC, we compare these child poverty measures for a selection of European member states having comparable living standard. Despite being the best available source for cross-national comparisons of living standards within the European Union, the EU-SILC only offers a few pieces of the multidimensional puzzle. The analysis focuses on children aged 6 to 12 years and uses to traditional income poverty indicator to determine whether the child is poor in a monetary sense. The multidimensional poverty indicator will be based on a set of deprivation indicators in areas such as financial well being, housing, neighbourhood and education. Except for the education indicator, which is measured at the level of the child, all other indicators are measured at a household level thereby providing information on the child's direct environment. Reviewing the various conceptual and methodological approaches used in the literature, we will explain how this information can be used in a child-specific and multidimensional poverty approach. The proposed analysis will thus show what child specific and multidimensional analysis can be done with the currently available information the EU-SILC.

Further, from a methodological perspective, cross-national comparisons are a very useful means to better understand and test the internal consistency of newly developed concepts and their empirical implementation; the variation in patterns observed between countries can be used as a source to dissect differences in outcomes that can be attributed to methodological choices and those that are due to actual changes in well being. Given the increased use of child specific and multidimensional deprivation indicators in national and international policy arenas, an enhanced understanding of such aspects feeds in to an informed selection and interpretation of such indicators. In our paper, differences in cross-national patterns of overlap of poverty groups can broadly be explained by differences in the construction of the EU-SILC database, differences in the socio-demographics and differences in the national policy environment. An exact decomposition of the sources of variation in overlap patterns is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we will thoroughly review the available information on data collection and processing to see to what extent differences in the data can be expected to play a role. We will further use a set of descriptive multivariate techniques to see in what way differences in cross-national overlap can be attributed to observable differences in characteristics of poverty groups.