Assessing the Structure of Small Welfare States

Social Policies in Small States Series No 4

Geoff Bertram

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Historically, the welfare state evolved as the most efficient policy response to caring for a large, homogeneous population. This traditional model, however, loses importance as population size falls below 3-4 million, especially for states where a significant number of the population migrate and send remittances home, and where the country is the recipient of overseas aid. Facilitating the international mobility of people therefore becomes central to social policy and insofar as the welfare state occurs, it tends to be focused on the labour market.

This paper examines how the characteristics of small states influence their pursuit of a welfare state. Many of the small states discussed have not previously featured in mainstream thinking about the relationship between country size and the extent of the welfare state.

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Author

Geoff Bertram is a Senior Associate, Institute of Policy Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
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