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**Part II Structural Comparison of Inequality  
and Social Structures among Archetypal  
Country Case Studies**

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# 1

## Overview: Inequality and Transformation of Social Structures

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### Introduction

The transition from state socialism to market economies requires understanding of the nature of new societies emerging in the course of this transformation. This book is a result of a UNU/WIDER research project, which is part of the programme of studies of economies in transition. Its objective is to understand trends in social stratification and their causes, which is important for improving social policy.

The transition to a market economy has brought about inequality and social stratification of the former egalitarian societies. The high economic and social costs of the reforms, radical shifts in distribution of assets, increases in earnings inequality, changes of welfare regimes (in many cases associated with a decline in major social benefits) resulted in reranking relative income positions and social status for many social and professional groups. One of the most important outcomes of the transition has been increasing social distance between the 'winners' and 'losers' of the reforms (Haggard and Kaufman, 1995; Hellman, 1998). The newly-prosperous elites have managed to consolidate considerable economic and political power, while the number of the poor in 18 transitional countries rose twelvefold from nearly 14 million, or about 4 per cent of the population in 1989, to 168 million, or approximately 45 per cent in 1995 (UNDP, 1998: 15).

With important similarities in the changes induced by the transition, the intensity, timing and causes of them in individual countries have been far from uniform. The Central European (CE) countries have experienced smaller increases of income disparity, lower poverty rates, and possibly less radical shifts in social structure as compared to the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE). In a historically very short period the countries of the FSU have acquired strongly unequal patterns of income

distribution similar to those of high-inequality economies of Latin America (Milanovic, 1998; Cornia, 1996, 1999).

Social consequences and outcomes of the economic transformation from centrally-planned to market economies have attracted considerable attention by policy-makers, international organizations, including donor institutions, media and academic research. Considerable knowledge has been accumulated on social costs of the transition, poverty, its incidence determinants and composition. Yet much more remains to be analysed and understood in the processes of social stratification, and their diversity in different countries. One book would not be able to bridge all existing gaps, therefore this research project had three specific tasks:

- First, to identify structuring determinants of social change (in particular, economic processes as well as institutional and political changes that cause social mobility, inequality and poverty, and which thereby shape social structures).
- Second, to map the main constituent parts of the emerging social structure using quantitative and qualitative data and group them into social strata within broadly defined new elites, the middle class and the lower classes.
- Third, to analyse diverging country developments determined by different historical trajectories and policy choices and thus obtain a more complete and more differentiated picture of emerging social structures than hitherto available.

In view of these goals, the methodology and structure of the research was designed as represented by the contents of the volume. The international team of contributors chose to present a multifaceted view of the very diverse and complex picture of social structures in transition. The authors from different backgrounds and various theoretical schools offer their own understanding of social processes. It was not the purpose of the editor to suppress certain differences in approaches or interpretations into one straight line of analysis, which would otherwise suffer from one-sidedness. Indeed, it would hardly be possible to gather a team sharing the same basic views on social stratification as this area is among the most contested in contemporary sociology. It seems therefore more productive to accept the diversity of opinions and approaches.

This chapter gives an overview of major findings and implications for policies conducive to social integration and social cohesion. The subsequent chapters provide analyses of transformation of social structures in transition economies as a whole with a view of existing diversity of these processes. Chapter 2 by Timo Piirainen summarizes a point of departure: pre-transitional social structures in centrally-planned economies and analyses new determinants of social stratification in transitional societies, in the first place the rise in income inequality as the most important new factor of emergent class divisions. Chapter 3 by Vladimir Gimpelson focuses on labour markets

and changes in employment structure as a major determinant of social change. Chapters 4 through 6 discuss in depth the processes of social reranking among various groups and emerging new (or transforming old) social classes: the economic and political elite (Iván Szelényi and Christy Glass), the middle classes (György Lengyel and Péter Róbert), and lower classes and the poor (Alastair McAuley).

The second part of the book includes five country case studies (Chapters 7 through 11) of Russia (Nodari Simonia), Poland (Jarosław Górnaiak), the Czech Republic (Jiří Večerník), Uzbekistan (Richard Pomfret), and Kyrgyzstan (Vladimir Mikhalev and Georges Heinrich). These archetype cases with different initial conditions, reform strategies and major economic and social outcomes have been selected for purposes of comparative analysis in order to better understand the diversity of changes underway on the vast geographic space of Eastern Europe and the FSU.

### **Social structures prior to the transition**

The focus of this study is social structures which emerge in the course of transition. Therefore trends in contemporary social structures are compared to the relatively extended period of stability prior to the transition, that is, the period of 1970–80s. *Social structure* is understood as the composition of the society of distinctive social-class or social-status groups, while *stratification* is a dynamic process of differentiation of society into these groups.

The essential characteristics of the economic organization and redistributive system which defined social structures in socialist countries before the transition included:

- state ownership of the means of production;
- full employment;
- labour wages earned at state enterprises as a principal source of income;
- an income-levelling policy which did not encourage accumulation of individual wealth; and
- a pervasive system of public transfers providing everybody with basic social services and benefits.

Under such conditions social structures were characterized by very limited private property ownership, a high labour force participation rate (including women) with employment predominantly in state-sector enterprises, and an egalitarian structure of income distribution with low levels of inequality. The control of the economy by the state essentially diminished the importance of the ownership of the means of production as the basic definitional distinction of social classes (Słomczyński and Shabad, 1997: 160). The class structure of societies under state socialism did not strictly correspond to the division of economic power. The widely shared understanding by Marxist and most other

social scientists is that major classes existing in socialist societies are working class, peasants and white-collar workers (intelligentsia) (Connor, 1979: 89–90).

Szelényi and Kostello (1998) characterize the socialist economies prior to transition as redistributively integrated. The average level of cash incomes was generally low and barely above subsistence minimum, but basic food and consumer goods were heavily subsidized and essential social services including education, healthcare and housing were distributed free of charge. Even with the existence of unofficial ways of supplementing income, inequalities in countries of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union were much narrower than in the Western capitalist world (Davis and Scase, 1985; Lane, 1978).

Following Max Weber's approach, Piirainen in this volume further considers the pre-transition societies as stratified into 'status groups' rather than into classes. Market mechanisms there were suppressed, so that they could not develop to the extent of allowing real class divisions to emerge; relationships based on reciprocity played a more important role than that of the market. Social divisions in these societies nevertheless existed, but they were based on social networks and political power determining allocation and redistribution of resources according to a rigid system of rank and status. Status positions were associated not with market power but with being part of a group, to which access was restricted by social networks.

Social status totally depended on one's place in the power hierarchy from the top level of the party nomenklatura to ever lower levels of bureaucracy with ordinary citizens at the very bottom of social ranking. Political power was the source of privileges of the Soviet nomenklatura, which formed a clear status group, rather than class, with its distinct virtues, privileges, obligations, functions and lifestyle marking positions in society (Piirainen, 1997: 23). Nomenklatura positions were achieved according to rules, norms and policies which made these social groups increasingly closed with channels of upward mobility for the most part restricted (Starikov, 1996).

Within the overwhelming majority of ordinary not particularly well-off citizens who did not belong to nomenklatura, social distinctions were determined not so much by income or asset ownership but rather by level of education and labour qualifications. Professionals and intellectuals generally enjoyed a higher social status and occupied more prestigious positions, although their incomes were not necessarily higher than those of the working class. On the other hand, the official communist ideology attributed high importance to manual-labour workers who represented a social base of the Communist Party and were regarded as politically more reliable than intellectuals. Part of the higher-skilled labour elite enjoyed a privileged social status.

Peasantry in the former socialist societies had more distinctive class characteristics. In the Soviet collectivized system farmers occupied a clearly inferior position, being discriminated as compared with industrial workers in wage

remuneration and cash transfer benefits. Even more marked distinctions of peasantry as a social class existed in countries which had preserved private land ownership (for example, in Poland).

More social divisions emerged in the last decade of communist rule when private activities on a limited scale were allowed and shadow economic activities expanded on an ever-increasing scale. Players in the second economy began to earn higher incomes considerably changing their lifestyles, including access to better housing and availability of cars and other consumer goods which used to be regarded as luxuries by the majority of the society (Szelényi and Kostello, 1998: 316). Thus prior to the beginning of radical market-oriented reforms, former socialist societies were already acquiring important elements of market economies and with them certain features of a class society.

Poverty and exclusion in the pre-reform period was limited to certain vulnerable categories of the population. These included single-parent families or large families with many children. One income in a family was often inadequate due to low wage levels and social benefits were barely sufficient to raise living standards up to the level of subsistence (Braithwaite, 1997). Pensioners on a low pension living alone were another high-risk category. Finally, there has always been a small marginalized group of homeless people and those released from the penitentiary system at high risk of poverty due to their disadvantaged position in finding jobs, getting housing and residence permits.

## **Determinants of social stratification in transitional societies**

Transition to the market brings about distinctive social classes (as opposed to status groups) defined by economic interests in pursuit of possession of assets, goods and opportunities for income as major determinants of life chances. According to Weber (1978), in modern societies inequalities generated by markets translate into an uneven distribution of life chances and thus produce a major source of social stratification. The significance of income, type of employment and property ownership as a determinant of social status has greatly increased, while the role of state-provided welfare as well as numerous perks available to formerly privileged groups has drastically diminished or ceased to exist. With the transition to the market, life chances of working people have become more dependent on the quality of education, the level of skills and professional experience.

In reality, societies in transition continue to be mixed systems where markets coexist with redistributive mechanisms and reciprocity-based relationships (Szelényi and Kostello, 1998: 307). Essential assets (social capital) which defined social ranking prior to transition can be converted into new assets – economic capital crucial for occupying a higher status/class position in the newly-evolving social structure (Piirainen, 1997: 42–3). While undergoing

transformation, social networks demonstrate strong sustainability and largely influence the processes of social mobility, particularly the formation (or transformation) of local elites. Extended family and clan relationships are deep-rooted in social structures of the FSU (particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia) and SEE, and in some countries social networks are inter-related with the ethnic factor. Ethnicity has a strong influence on social stratification in many countries of Eastern Europe and the FSU, particularly on the formation of new elites as well as on determinants and the composition of poverty.

Political and economic liberalization is removing rigidities in social structure. The emergence of multiparty systems and freedom of personal choice in types of activity, places of work and residence, as well as lifestyle, have greatly increased social mobility. These processes have been enhanced by the opening of society to the outside world, increasing integration of local economies into the world economy. International factors have come to influence social stratification. At the upper end, elites are benefiting from their role in mediating between domestic and international economies, and are socialized into the global economic perspective as they may personally move their assets and their families abroad. This internationalization of the elite contributes to domestic social divisions. At the other end of the scale there is considerable migration of the labour force. Here, Armenians moving into Russia and Ukrainian workers taking jobs in the Czech Republic are not the only examples. Remittances make up an important part of income in poorer countries, while a new ethnic worker underclass is emerging in the more developed post-socialist economies. All of this is reinforcing the informal sector.

The expanding freedom has also had big costs in weakening the rule of law and social order. The institutional vacuum caused by the disintegration of the Communist Party has led to a decline in the state's capacity to implement consistent economic and social policies since the old administrative system could not be immediately replaced. Law-abiding societal standards and institutions need a much longer time to be built and mature, which may require a generational change. The collapse of the state is reflected by informalization of the economy, the inability of government to deliver basic public goods, and to set up and enforce an appropriate regulatory framework. It manifests itself in the accumulation of wage, tax and trade arrears, and demonetization of the economy. Underdevelopment of civil society has caused the spread of rent-seeking opportunities and practices, which in their extreme form lead to outright corruption, while weak legal systems and poor law enforcement give rise to organized crime and mafia. All these processes have a strong impact on the position of various social classes and groups.

As suggested by Słomczyński and Shabad (1997: 171) 'for some period of time the class structure of post-communist societies will be a hybrid one,

shaped both by the legacy of the past political-economic order and by the requisites and opportunities afforded by emergent capitalism'. There are yet no clear social boundaries between classes and status groups, as well as no internal unity and understanding of common interests within them. Mobility between groups is high, whilst the emerging classes and social groups are themselves fragmented to the point of internal polarization (Starikov, 1996). Although the process of transition was a peaceful one, in a number of countries it had a revolutionary nature leading to disintegration of the very fabric of society. Thus social ties remain very unstable and the process of reintegration may take decades.

The collapse of the centrally-planned economic system, macroeconomic stabilization and structural reforms aimed at transition to a market economic system caused a fall in output and living standards. In most cases transformational recession proved to be much deeper and longer, and decline in welfare more profound than anticipated. The overall decline in real incomes has affected the welfare of wide groups of the population, whilst the simultaneous emergence of powerful market forces has caused a profound shift towards a more unequal income distribution. The considerable differentiation in earnings opportunities has affected both wages and other sources of incomes originating from newly-emerging forms of economic activity: profits, rent, interest earnings and dividends.

Income inequality has become a major factor of social stratification. Inequality measured by the Gini coefficient of income distribution increased on average from 24 to 33 in all countries in transition since the initiation of market-oriented reforms (Milanovic, 1998: 40–6). This change is particularly striking because it occurred in an unprecedentedly short period of time – only six years. It implies a radical transition from prereform egalitarian distributional structures to levels of inequality prevailing in OECD countries or even, in the case of the FSU, to patterns of high inequality such as are found in Latin America (Cornia, 1996: 18).

The extent, speed and direction of changes in distributional patterns were largely determined by reform strategies (big-bang or gradualist) or chosen 'target models' of a market economy (ranging from 'liberal Anglo-Saxon model' to social-democratic welfare state or 'middle-income developing country model'). However the impact of the speed and direction of reforms was significantly influenced by different initial socioeconomic conditions in transitional economies.

### **Macroeconomic and social-sector reforms: the impact on income distribution**

Economic reforms aimed at transition to the market include such essential components as elimination of price controls, efforts to stop inflation, the process of transferring property from the state to private individuals,

liberalization of labour markets, exchange rate and foreign trade regimes. All this has direct implications for economic growth, employment and opportunities to earn income and patterns of its distribution. The above policies have been the primary focus of governments implementing reforms. Other policy components which could be called safety nets – support for the unemployed, pensions for the elderly, and programmes for the relief of poverty – have received much less attention (Kapstein and Mandelbaum, 1997) because of financial constraints, or sometimes out of neglect. Unlike macroeconomic policies affecting production, social sector policies are redistributive. If rigorously pursued they would have an equalizing effect on distribution of income and wealth, but due to their weakness their impact on income distribution and social structure has generally been very passive – they have failed to contain rapid increases in inequality.

Privatization leads directly to a redistribution of assets and hence sources of income and determinants of social status. The number of capital-asset owners has risen sharply with ‘small privatization’, the informalization of the economy and the removal of barriers to entry. While measurement presents a serious problem, some evidence suggests that the share of income from profits, self-employment and ‘other incomes’ has risen steadily, particularly in those countries where the wage economy and public transfers have collapsed. In Russia, the share of entrepreneurial and property incomes in total personal monetary income increased from 11.2 to 45.5 per cent during 1990–96 (Goscomstat, 1997: 73). It is likely that an increase in their share entails a rise in overall inequality.

A general trend appears to be a sharp rise in the concentration in larger property and capital income, and a more moderate one in self-employment income. The shift towards property concentration would likely be larger in the FSU, where the regulatory role of the state (to ensure, for instance, market competition) is less developed. So, despite a relatively modest increase in the share of property and self-employment incomes, their contribution to the overall increase in inequality seems to have been substantial in view of the rapid increase in the skewness of their distribution.

Change in the labour-market model has led to an increase in wages differentials, and in the appearance of unemployment and underemployment as discussed in detail in Chapter 3 by Gimpelson. Earnings differentiation by skills, sector and occupation appears to be a major source of inequality, whilst wage deregulation has had an overall disequalizing effect of an increase in wage dispersion across industries (controlling for the skill intensity of each sector). In many cases this increase in interindustrial wage dispersion is explained by the monopolistic behaviour of strategic sectors (mining, energy and utilities) able to extort wage and price increases due to their political strength and influence (Mikhalev and Björkstén, 1995). Greater productivity differentials, following price liberalization and productivity gains due to restructuring, appear so far to have a minor influence on wage levels.

Social stratification within the working class is determined by segmentation of labour markets by type of skills and sector of economic activity. A smaller fraction of the most competitive workers enjoys considerable advantages in higher pay levels and job security (Gimpelson and Lippoldt, 1996), which can be partially explained by the short supply of skilled workers needed for jobs entailing 'new skills', leading to overremuneration of a privileged segment of the labour force. A better position and stability in the job market is ensured not least by personal networks which may have an even greater influence in the new private than in the public sector.

The rise in unemployment is directly related to a loss of income and social status of that part of the population affected in a situation where unemployment insurance has not offered sufficient compensation. Moreover, the suppressed form of unemployment which prevails in the FSU in the form of short-time working, unpaid leave and mounting wage arrears, contributes to greater social inequality. Such hidden forms of underemployment redistribute losses from stronger (more competitive) to weaker (less competitive) workers and thus lead to further segmentation of the working class (Gimpelson, 1998).

The collapse of the wage economy, growing job insecurity and decreasing formal employment opportunities force people to resort to activities in the shadow economy. The increasing part of the working population living outside the official economy is left out of the boundaries of any legal norms and safety nets. The formation of such a dual economy, which has a potential to evolve into a pattern characteristic of economic structures of third-world countries, creates a serious impediment to the development of a socially integrated society.

## **Reform strategies and diverging country trends in inequality**

Reform strategies and their effects on social stratification by country have been very diverse. Major differences exist between the situation in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia on the one hand, and countries of the FSU and SEE on the other. Generally speaking, the social situation in East-Central Europe has been much better than in the rest of the former socialist world undergoing transition. Market reforms in the FSU have been far more difficult because of much heavier legacies of the centrally-planned economy, burdened to a greater extent by massive inefficiencies and distortions compounded by pervasive militarization of production. Contrary to CE states, which managed to implement consistent fiscal and monetary reforms that brought quick stabilization and economic recovery, Russia and other republics of the FSU (with the exception of the Baltics) demonstrated failures in macroeconomic stabilization and major structural reforms (Cornia and Popov, 2001). The social costs of the lack of stabilization, prolonged inflation and recession there have been very high. The hardships

of the majority of citizens and extraordinary social inequality have been made worse by very poor tax collection, pervasive corruption and rent-seeking.

From the available evidence, we may suggest the following major causes of diverging country patterns of inequality and social mobility:

- First, inequality has risen faster in the FSU because of the sharper recession experienced in comparison with CE. In the FSU, the fall in the wage share has been compounded by the huge wage arrears accumulated by most companies.
- Second, earnings inequality in the FSU rose much faster than in CE. In addition, adverse policy factors (the abandonment of effective minimum wage regulation; the more than proportional decline of social sector wages; the inability to contain wage increases in the monopolistic-rent sector) in the FSU seem to have greatly contributed to income inequality and a decline in social status of several professional and occupational groups.
- Third, social transfers in the FSU were traditionally lower, have fallen faster, and are less efficiently targeted. The decline of social welfare there can be explained by a weakening of the state capacity to implement consistent social policies. In CE, social transfers have not fallen as dramatically and helped to contain the surge of inequality over the short-term. The long-term effect of this policy is, however, questionable because of the long-term intergenerational distributive problems it may cause. In addition, even over the short term transfer policy may have been less than ideal. While family allowances, unemployment compensation and social assistance appear to have been increasingly better targeted, pension reform has contributed to a shift towards greater inequality.
- Finally, in some of these countries, the surge in inequality might have been exacerbated by the approach followed in the privatization of state assets and by a greater informalization of the economy.

Divergence between individual country development patterns requires case studies representing economies with different levels of inequality as well as different causes of the increase of inequality (depth of the recession; extent of the collapse of the wage economy; approaches to privatization; level and targeting of social transfers). These countries also often represent different ‘overall archetypes’ of market economies. For purposes of comparative analysis, five such archetype country cases have been selected in this study. They differ in sets of initial conditions, reform strategies, property-rights regimes, the role of the state in the economy, patterns of income distribution and evolving social structures. The countries selected include Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Four of these five countries: (i) Poland and the Czech Republic, and (ii) Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, can be considered as pairs having very similar initial conditions but

following different reform strategies, and/or demonstrating different macro-economic and social results.

Two broad patterns seem to be emerging from analysis of the available evidence: (1) a fairly moderate increase in inequality in CE, and (2) a rapid surge of inequality in the FSU and SEE.

### **Centre Europe: a comparatively moderate increase in inequality**

In the CE economies the Gini coefficient of net per capita household income rose on average by 4 percentage points, an amount surprisingly similar to the 'average difference' between the market and socialist economies of Europe during the pre-transition period. At present, the CE economies (with the exception of Poland) have Gini coefficients similar to those of the UK and Canada, and higher than those of the Nordic countries and Germany. For these economies one could hypothesize a 'physiological adaptation of inequality' to levels typical of a Western market economy. However, this 'spontaneous adaptation' hypothesis does not seem to be borne out by the evidence, as in CE the sources of inequality are substantially different from those of the developed market economies.

The social structures of CE countries in transition did not experience polarization to an extreme extent. While reranking of social status of various groups is certainly taking place, the gap between the elite and the rest of the society looks less profound while the group of severely deprived people is far less massive than in the FSU. These countries have made real progress in the formation of a middle class of small entrepreneurs. A substantial part of professionals and intellectuals, especially the younger of them, have found their successful way in the market economy.

Significant differences, however, exist between CE countries, as the comparison between the Czech Republic and Poland shows. Both Poland and the Czech Republic are radical and consistent reformers that inherited more mobile economies less burdened with the military sector and over-industrialization, and which had more developed social sectors. They both experienced a modest recession and rather quick recovery. The distributional consequences of the transition, however, happened to be quite different. The Czech Republic demonstrated a persistence of the wage economy, a low earnings inequality, voucher privatization, and a strong and targeted transfer system. In Poland privatization was delayed, the wage economy experienced a decline while the social transfer system, albeit quite large, had significant distortions. Consequently, Poland has much higher levels of earnings and income inequality as well as the incidence of poverty. Social reranking in Poland also looks more significant than in the Czech Republic. It appears that the Czech Republic has preserved much more of the old social structure than Poland, where the formation of the new capitalist and middle class is among the most intensive of the countries in transition.

### **The FSU and SEE: a rapid surge in inequality**

In most of the FSU and SEE, the Gini coefficient of the distribution of net per capita household income rose by about 10 percentage points – that is, 2–2.5 times faster than in CE. Income inequality in these countries is now substantially greater than in most OECD countries, and is gradually moving in the direction of that of the high-inequality countries of Latin America, even if the sources of inequality seem to be quite different. Even these data may give only a partial idea of the distributional earthquake underway in the region. In view of the growing underreporting of income that affects official surveys, it is likely that income disparity over the past decade has risen even faster. Smaller surveys (with fairly accurate reporting of incomes) seem to indicate that a tiny class of ‘new rich’ now controls an exorbitant share of total income. In Russia, the income gap between the more affluent 10 per cent of the population and the poorest 10 per cent increased from four times at the start of the reforms to 13.3 times in April 1998 (Goscomstat, 1998: 213). The former get 33 per cent of all incomes, and the latter a meagre 2.4 per cent.

The social structure within Russia and some other countries in the FSU is characterized by the emergence of an extremely wealthy and powerful economic elite, alongside impoverishment and deprivation of a broad strata of the population. Extremely skewed income and asset distribution impedes the formation of a middle class, and the losers of the transition generally largely outnumber a small heterogeneous group of winners. Corruption and crime largely influencing the processes of social stratification have acquired a far larger scale compared to CE.

South Eastern Europe (SEE) (in particular Romania and Bulgaria) is characterized by a slower progress of economic reform and high levels of social inequality and poverty. The local economy has experienced a considerable recession and medium to high informalization. Privatization and liberalization were initially quite limited, earnings inequality is high, while the social transfer system has proved rather weak. Despite growing inequality, social mobility and reranking is yet more limited compared to other countries in Eastern Europe. Delayed privatization has not allowed a significant capitalist class to evolve, and even slower is the formation of small-scale entrepreneurship. While income levels of the working class, farmers and intelligentsia have declined due to economic recession, stratification of their social status (apart from earnings differentiation) has not yet taken place on a significant scale. These processes, however, are likely to intensify after more radical reform policies are initiated.

Within this vast region significant divergence of emergent social structures by country can be observed. Russia, the largest transitional economy, had the longest history of central planning and economies distorted by large-scale inefficient heavy industries with a big share of the military-industrial

complex. Russia has demonstrated a shock-therapy approach, deep recession, a collapse of the wage economy, insider privatization, and a high degree of informalization of the economy. At the same time Russia has experienced the highest level of earnings and income inequality and weakness of the social transfer system. Poverty rates are quite high, the number of losers is massive, while the might and wealth of powerful elites largely determines the economic and political scene. Corruption and crime have also reached exorbitant proportions. Russia appears to have had a considerable reranking in income positions and social hierarchies.

The region of Central Asia has considerable specificity as well as diversity, which can be seen by comparing Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. These two newly-independent countries have a common heritage as former Soviet republics with similar social and economic structures. They were characterized by higher proportions of rural populations; largely distorted economies dominated by narrowly specialized collectivized farming; and a substantial portion of defence industries and high dependence on financial transfers from the metropolitan centre. Reform strategies, however, have been quite different. Kyrgyzstan introduced rather radical liberalization similar to the Russian case. Transformational recession there as well as the collapse of wages was very deep while the system of social protection proved far inadequate. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan has had pervasive informalization of the economy and very high levels of income inequality and poverty. On the contrary, Uzbekistan following a gradualist reform strategy, has had modest recession, limited informalization, moderate earnings inequality, no privatization and a strong social protection system. Social stratification in Kyrgyzstan has gone considerably further than in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan has seen the formation of a noticeable group of businessmen, mainly in the commercial and banking sector, whilst a considerable part of the Kyrgyz population has moved into subsistence self-employment, ranging from shuttle-traders to farmers who received their plots of land for individual use but are for the most part unable to set up productive crop cultivation or cattle breeding. Similar changes in Uzbekistan are much more limited due to slow transition. Corruption and crime are widespread in both countries but Kyrgyzstan may be more exposed to those phenomena due to a weaker government. Drug trafficking is a particularly serious social problem, especially in Kyrgyzstan. Clan relationships and community networks have crucial influence on social structures in both these Central Asian countries.

### **Social reranking and emerging social classes**

For purposes of analysing changes in social structure, social actors can be grouped according to descriptive typological characteristics into politicians, bureaucrats, managers, entrepreneurs, professionals, blue-collar workers,

farmers and peasants. These distinguishable groups differ by such features as levels of skill and education, employment in the private or the public sector, or in informal economic activities (in particular, subsistence self-employment). They can be further ranked and ascribed to broader social status and class groups using such determinants as income, asset ownership (including land), education, political influence, lifestyle, consumption, and social prestige of the job. The above indicators can also serve to measure economic and social distance between groups.<sup>1</sup> In many cases a higher level of income and consumption corresponds to higher education and social prestige. However, in the specific situation of transitional societies a high educational level and socially prestigious job (for example, professor, researcher or artist) may still indicate a higher social status despite low income (declined in the course of transition) and restrained consumption.

Redistribution of income and assets and the rise in inequality in transitional societies has led to greater *social polarization* which is understood here as widening distance between groups, in particular between upper and lower levels within the social structure. Apart from an increase in 'economic distance' between groups of households, the economic transition is also associated with considerable reranking among socioeconomic groups, and sharp changes in social hierarchies. Such social reranking can be viewed as *mobility* (upwards and downwards) from one group to another, or up or down in the hierarchy. These changes have been rather rapid and the process of social stratification has not yet stabilized. The available statistics and social surveys do not allow a clear definition of newly-emergent social groups. The widespread concept of winners and losers in the course of the transition may be used, although its analytical limitations should be recognized.

In addition to the loss of income they may have experienced, many of the people enjoying high 'social status' and 'political power' during the former regime appear to have been relegated to the bottom of the social ladder. Loss of social status has been common among the former 'labour elite', that is, the middle-aged, semi-skilled workers employed in heavy industry, part of the intellectual class, and managers of state companies. A considerable part of this wide group, especially members of the *nomenklatura*, enterprise managers and younger professionals, seems, however, to have adjusted to the new situation and retained considerable social status. Social disorientation is acute for most of the elderly who see their values, norms and lifetime savings, vanishing. Loss of political power is obviously most acute among the older generation of party cadres and bureaucrats. The position of civil servants is also weakened by lack of funds and widespread mistrust in anything that is 'socialist', 'social' or even 'public'.

The intensity of social reranking, mobility and the extent of social distance between upper and lower classes compared to the situation prior to transition differs significantly by archetypal transitional countries as diverse

as Poland, Russia or those in Central Asia. A broad pattern of social stratification apparent in transitional societies includes:

- 1 the new elite (it is especially important to investigate who are the new capitalists and what is the nature of emerging capitalism);
- 2 the middle class (despite widespread perception that there is no middle class in post-communist societies, there is evidence of a rapidly growing new commercial, managerial and professional middle class);
- 3 the most numerous lower class, including the bulk of the working class (blue-collar workers), farmers and peasants, lower-rank employees in research, health, education and social care institutions and government administration; and
- 4 socially deprived and marginalized groups.

Attempts to assess quantitative proportions of social classes in a transitional society face serious methodological and data problems. For this purpose information from various sociological surveys and income statistics is usually used, and income levels and household assets generally serve as prime criteria for ranking by social class or status. This information may be supported by self-evaluation of respondents obtained from opinion polls. Such survey by the Moscow Institute of Socio-Political Research in 1994 estimated about 6 per cent of Russians as belonging to the 'rich' or the upper class, and 29 per cent to the middle class (Khlop'ev, 1996: 99–100). The majority of the remaining 65 per cent of the population would represent the lower classes or, as Zaslavskaya (1997) identifies it, the 'base stratum' of the society. Part of this majority has been affected by poverty and includes severely deprived social groups.

Poverty measurement in transitional societies presents specific problems which preclude accurate measurement. For the analysis of social stratification a further difficulty lies in the fact that poverty for many people has a transitional short-term character. In the Russian case official estimates of the poverty rate have fluctuated within 25–33 per cent of the population. For the analysis of social structures the incidence of long-term poverty is a more reliable indicator of the proportion of the population qualified as severely deprived or marginalized, and new research by Ovcharova and colleagues based on multiple criteria revealed 8.3 per cent of Russian households in a representative sample were affected by long-term poverty in 1996 (Ovcharova *et al.*, 1998).

### **Implications for policy**

An overview of social structures in transition reveals serious changes in a historically very short period of time. The market has opened new opportunities, created new social classes and groups and intensified upward and

downward social mobility. Considerable reranking and redistribution of life chances has occurred for many social groups; new opportunities have opened to winners, but there are also many losers whose ranks may be joined by some of those who initially did well in the new market economy. While the process of transition proceeds, the social structure remains unstable and variable with intense changes in the numerical sizes of groups and strata from year to year.

Deep polarization based on income inequality has become a salient feature of social stratification marking divisions not only between social classes, but within each group, including the base stratum, due to segmentation of labour, the spread of unemployment, self-employment and informalization of the economy. Apart from economic decline, the rise in inequality of income distribution has been a major factor in the expansion of poverty with all its negative consequences for human development. This apparent social dislocation bears dangerous prospects of a loss of self-identity by part of the society, a decline in solidarity and a potential for rising social conflict. The processes of social stratification in transitional societies thus present serious challenges for policy, which is needed to promote social integration and social cohesion.

Developing a policy agenda for social integration and social cohesion requires trade-offs and hard choices. The main trade-off is not between redistribution, social justice and productive efficiency (and/or growth), rather it lies between the inherited systems of universal welfare provision and scarce resources available to maintain them, and hence the need for social policy reforms and more targeted systems of social security. Recognizing the importance of social development goals does not mean that the reforming courtiers can afford to switch back to consumer subsidies and universal welfare pledged by (if not fully provided) by the former communist governments. The capacity of local economies, especially in the CIS countries, is not sufficient to allow high living standards and costly social benefits to be maintained.

Inclusive policies leading to reductions in poverty and strengthening social cohesion require the development of institutions and civil society to empower citizens, including the poor and disadvantaged. The poor need a mechanism through which they can express their needs and influence the political process at national and local levels. Therefore a primary task faced by transitional countries is building inclusive institutions which are representative of all parts of society, including the poor, but no less importantly the middle class. A strong middle class is essential to the functioning of effective, democratic and transparent institutions; therefore its interests need to be genuinely represented.

Policies promoting empowerment of the poor and the middle class include such essential elements as (1) promoting dissemination of information on social rights and policy choices to ensure these rights, and fostering

public debate on development strategies; (2) decentralization of public services to move them closer to citizens; and (3) strengthening of local communities and civil society organizations and promoting their collaboration with local governments. These tasks are not straightforward and easily achievable, especially in countries of the CIS with a longer history of centralized authoritarian rule. In many of these countries traditional bases for civil society and community cohesion are underdeveloped or nonexistent and need to be reconstructed. Sometimes this process needs to overcome local-level inequalities, built-in local power structures and clan organization. Bringing households, groups and networks together can work as an effective means of citizen empowerment through collective action towards improving community welfare.

Within broad similarities of the social policy context in transitional economies, social policy processes and outcomes have considerable country specificity. As has been shown by this and other analyses (for example, Cornia and Popov, 2001), countries in transition are moving towards very different 'archetypes of economy'. Radical variations are characterized not only in terms of export orientation, industrial policies, investment rates and prospects for association to economic groupings like the EU, or the Council of Europe. Equally important are systemic differences related to levels of 'socially-acceptable' asset and income inequality, the role of the state, polarization of social structures, and social mobility. The choice of policy options available is thus determined by alternative patterns of market economy that the countries in transition are moving towards, the constraints imposed by the economic structures chosen, and by the desire to maximize growth and poverty alleviation.

## Note

- 1 Tatyana Zaslavskaya (1997) used ten status variables to identify the position of various groups in the social structure: educational level; self-assessment of skills; basic occupation; principal kind of activity; economic branch in which the person is employed; sector of the economy (according to type of property); size of the enterprise (firm) in terms of number of employed; professional and occupational group (determined by the nature of the work performed and the respondent's self-assessment); and the level of real income.

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