

**From protection towards activation: reform of social assistance in the Czech Republic***Tomáš Sirovátka*

In this paper we will assess the transformation of social assistance scheme in the Czech Republic in a broader policy context. We will try to identify the nature of the reform, the direction of the reform and the key factors which have influenced the reform. We reflect whether the recent reforms represent a departure from the formerly established model and whether there have been some implications on the reforms enacted as a reaction to the 2008 financial and economic crisis. We build our findings on the institutional analysis of the policy changes (legislation) and its implementation. When doing it we refer to both primary sources like the programme and policy documents and direct observation and secondary sources (other analyses focused on the reforms in this field) and to the available statistical data.

In the Czech Republic social assistance scheme has been implemented only in 1991. This ‘social safety net’ combined with other social benefits proved to be effective buffer against poverty until now. In recent years the radical shift towards the ‘activation paradigm’ has emerged which seems to be a departure from the former model of social assistance which laid emphasis on the objective of social protection. This reform has been triggered by coincidence of several factors: the politics of transformation (*protest avoidance* strategy), domination of the neoliberal political discourse, the gap between the policy discourse and opportunistic policies by government which eroded solidarity with social assistance recipients and the socially divisive policies, the communist legacy of ‘top-down policy making’, the economic pressures during transformation and cost containment due to the EU accession and the strategy of the government to legitimize the other social reforms consisting in cuts in benefits and public services.

Tomáš Sirovátka  
Faculty of Social Studies  
Masaryk University  
Joštova 10  
60200 Brno  
Czech Republic  
Phone + 42 5 4949 6559  
Fax + 42 5 4949 1920  
e-mail: [sirovatk@fss.muni.cz](mailto:sirovatk@fss.muni.cz)