

Social assistance schemes and activation strategies

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The trend towards activation has been one of the major issues in recent welfare state reforms. However, recent social policy literature has tended to focus on the policies promoting the labour force participation of the unemployed and the early retired, often to the neglect of analysis of the changes in the work requirements and activation strategies and practices for social assistance recipients of working age. This paper compares the levels of net benefit packages, the work requirements, the insertion and integration programmes and related sanctions for social assistance recipients in 24 EU countries. We draw on data gathered by means of a network of national expert informants.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, this paper looks in some depth at the dominant trends in benefit levels and policies measures geared at increasing labour market participation and empowerment of social assistance recipients in recent times. Second, this article focuses on cross-country differences in activation approaches. There have been several attempts to classify activation models. Such classifications often suggest that in the so-called liberal welfare states the main objective is reducing individualised dependency and strengthening labour market attachment while in the Nordic welfare states the emphasis is on human resource development and overcoming skills and experience deficits. In this article we ask whether and to what extent the observed cross-country patterns in activation measures actually fit such classifications. To this end, we have gathered information both on the regulatory framework concerning, for example, work measures and sanctions, and its actual implementation.