

Project description

In recent decades the share of service employment has increased greatly across Europe, fundamentally changing the structure of European labour markets and the nature of the economic risks that individual workers face. This project explored **how far reforms to unemployment protection systems, which were introduced and consolidated in a very different labour market context, are responding to the particular challenges of post-industrial labour markets.** Looking at **12 European countries**, it systematically examines reform patterns around three overlapping dimensions of post-industrial adaptation of unemployment protection systems; the homogenisation of unemployment benefit rights for different categories of the unemployed (**unemployment benefit homogenization**); the erosion of the institutional boundaries between benefit provisions for the unemployed and for other groups of working-age people reliant on state support (**risk re-categorization**); and the ever-closer operational integration of income maintenance policies and other forms of labour market support (**activation**). Complementary comparative analyses explore the **effects of benefit reforms on employment**, the **changing composition of working-age benefit receipt** and **long-term developments in the content and nature of active labour market policies** for the unemployed.

Main research findings

Distinctive Adaptation Trajectories in Europe

While important reforms have taken place in almost all European unemployment protection schemes in recent decades, important cross-national variations persist in the scope and pace of reform to date. Three clusters of countries can be identified when we examine the intensity of integrative reform dynamics in European compensation schemes. **A first group** comprises **Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK**, and where integrative reform dynamics have been clearest and strongest. To this group might be added **Belgium**, due to the already encompassing nature of its unemployment category and its homogenised benefit structure, despite the absence of much institutional change in recent decades. **A second group** comprises **France, Italy and Sweden**, where some integrative dynamics are evident in recent reforms, though they remain, to date, more limited than in the first group. Finally, the **third group** comprises countries – **Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain and Switzerland** - where integrative reforms are least advanced, and the opposite trends are sometimes visible. Interestingly, each of these groups contains countries from more than one of the standard clusters of comparative welfare state analysis.

Political and Institutional Constraints on Integrative Change

Cross national variation can be explained by a range of political and institutional obstacles to integrative reform. The institutional legacy of unemployment protection development has meant that in a number of countries – such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Italy – the question of adaptation has been posed in distinctive terms. Reform has been particularly complicated where institutional fragmentations of unemployment protection arrangements maps onto divisions of labour between different levels of government, or between the state and social actors such as unions and employers associations. The social partners have in many instances also resisted changes to defend the interests of their core memberships, who are often firms and workers in the traditional industrial sectors that the inherited systems grew up alongside.

Identifiable Mechanisms of Policy Convergence

A number of mechanisms can nonetheless be identified that are suggestive of more thoroughgoing convergence in the institutional profile of European unemployment protection arrangements in the future. Integrative reforms seem to enjoy widespread support among governing elites from across the political spectrum. Far from obfuscating these changes, many governments seem to have seen them as opportunities to claim political credit. Institutional change, even if initially marginal, has also been encouraged by the advocacy efforts of supranational actors, who have become more energetic in this field in recent years. Finally, reform has in this field been encouraged by a number of institutional and policy 'spillovers', whereby even modest changes in a particular dimension of unemployment protection have tended to generate unintended consequences or anomalies that call forth reforms in other dimensions. As such, the process of 'triple integration' in European unemployment protection is being driven forward by a self-reinforcing dynamic of change.

Publication output

Regulating the Risk of Unemployment: National Adaptations to Post-Industrial Labour Markets in Europe. Edited by Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg, Oxford University Press, 2011

"Unemployment Protection and Labour Market Change in Europe: Towards Triple Integration?"

Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg

"The United Kingdom: Towards a Single Working Age Benefit"

Jochen Clasen

"France: Integration versus Dualisation"

Daniel Clegg

"Germany: Moving Towards Integration While Maintaining Segmentation"

Irene Dingeldey

"The Netherlands: Two Tiers for All"

Marcel Hoogenboom

"Belgium: A Precursor Muddling Through?"

Johan De Deken

"Switzerland: A Latecomer Catching Up?"

Cyrielle Champion

"Italy: Partial Adaptation of an Atypical Benefit System"

Matteo Jessoula and Patrik Vesan

"Spain: Fragmented Unemployment Protection in a Segmented Labour Market"

Francisco Xavier Mato

"Denmark: Ambiguous Modernisation of an Inclusive Unemployment Protection System"

Jorgen Goul Andersen

"Sweden: Ambivalent Adjustment"

Ola Sjoberg

"Hungary: Fiscal Pressures and Rising Resentment Against the (Idle) Poor"

Anil Duman and Agota Scharle

"The Czech Republic: Activation, Diversification, Marginalization"

Ondrej Hora and Tomas Sirovatka

"Quantity over Quality? A European Comparison of the Changing Nature of Transitions Between Non-Employment and Employment"

Werner Eichhorst, Regina Konle-Seidl, Alison Koslowski and Paul Marx

"Tracking Caseloads: The Changing Composition of Working-Age Benefit Receipt in Europe"

Jochen Clasen and Johan De Deken

"Active Labour Market Policies in a Changing Economic Context"

Giuliano Bonoli

"The Transformation of Unemployment Protection in Europe"

Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg



Research team

Giuliano Bonoli (IDHEAP)

Cyrielle Champion (IDHEAP)

Jochen Clasen (University of Edinburgh)

Daniel Clegg (University of Edinburgh)

Johan De Deken (University of Amsterdam)

Irene Dingeldey (University of Bremen)

Anil Duman (University of Budapest)

Werner Eichhorst (IZA Bonn)

Jorgen Goul Andersen (Aalborg University)

Marcel Hoogenboom (Utrecht University)

Ondrej Hora (Brno University)

Matteo Jessoula (University of Milan)

Regina Konle-Seidl (IAB)

Alison Koslowski (University of Edinburgh)

Fancisco Javier Mato (University of Oviedo)

Paul Marx (IZA Bonn)

Agota Scharle (University of Budapest)

Tomas Sirovatka (Brno University)

Ola Sjöberg (Stockholm University)

Patrik Vesan (University of Valle d'Aosta)

WP01
Tensions between
Flexibility and Security

Research task coordinators

Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg
(University of Edinburgh)