

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an 18-month-long research project commissioned by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to explore drivers and barriers to effective and efficient reforms aiming at improving the co-ordination between employment services and social services for minimum income recipients.

Background and context

Technological development, demographic trends and the effects of globalisation produce structural changes in post-industrial labour markets from both supply and demand perspectives. This has contributed to the increase of the vulnerabilities of the labour force, as well as the frequency of transitions between jobs and between employment and unemployment.

The recent global financial crisis and the ensuing upsurge in long-term unemployment have posed further challenges to welfare states, especially employment services and social protection. The crisis has intensified labour market volatility and, at the same time, fiscal and political pressures to improve the efficiency of public services in most EU Member States. The rise in long-term joblessness has negative effects on both society and the economy.

These developments necessitate an adjustment of the design of unemployment protection systems, which had originally been established to provide unemployment insurance for the temporarily unemployed male breadwinner and social assistance to those unable to work. In particular, this calls for the partial or full integration of unemployment insurance, minimum income schemes and social services for working-age social benefit recipients. In most countries, this would entail complex institutional reforms, as social and employment policies are co-ordinated by separate ministries and implemented by a variety of institutions often operating at different levels of government.

The need for such reforms has already been highlighted by the European Commission's Social Investment Package (SIP), which called 'for Member States to adapt their social models to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (European Commission, 2013). The European Parliament resolution of 29 October 2015 on a Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market explicitly called for 'close cooperation between, and effective co-ordination of, all parties involved in the re-integration of the long-term unemployed'.

While all Member States have responded to these challenges, there are significant variations on the depth and sophistication of reform initiatives across the EU. So far, closely co-ordinated or fully integrated, effective social and employment services for minimum income recipients are available in only about one third of Member States.

Objectives and scope of the study

The overall objective of this study is to support the implementation of more integrated social services delivery as outlined in the SIP, as well as the implementation of the recommendation on active inclusion and of the Council's

recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market.

The study focuses on recipients of minimum income schemes (MIS). Such schemes typically cover working-age individuals and their households (also extending to pensioners in some countries) who may be unemployed or economically inactive. MIS recipients often face multiple barriers in returning to the labour market and many are discouraged from looking for work.

The study provides a comprehensive and concise analysis and assessment of reform processes focused on integration of social services aimed at the activation of minimum income recipients in the labour market. The aim is:

- (a) to review the available evidence from previous and on-going reform processes to provide a critical assessment of each phase of the policy cycle, from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluation and follow-up;
- (b) to assess the fiscal costs and benefits of reforms;
- (c) to identify the determinants of the success and failure of reforms by comparing reform episodes across countries;
- (d) to elaborate pathways towards successful service integration.

In addition to contributing to the above objectives, the study contributes to filling important gaps in the existing literature and research by covering previously undocumented reforms in Eastern and Southern Europe, estimating costs and benefits for several reforms, and comparing reforms implemented in countries with similar institutional arrangements. The explicit inclusion of the institutional arrangements into the analytical framework of this study strengthens the validity of results as regards groups of countries and welfare regimes, and allows conclusions and recommendations to be put forward that could be transferable to other countries with similar institutional arrangements.

Methodological tools applied

The study is based on a **detailed description of reform episodes** in 12 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland) that were implemented between 2003 and 2014. An episode is understood to cover a full policy cycle from decision-making to evaluation. The selection of reform episodes ensures a varied sample in terms of the outcome of the reform and the institutional context. The 12 reform episodes also vary in terms of the degree of co-ordination of employment services and social services, and in terms of which functions and services are affected by the reform (Table 1).

Table 1. Variety of goals in recently initiated reforms

	<i>Loose/ informal</i>	<i>Multidisciplin ary teams</i>	<i>Partnership</i>	<i>Outsourcing</i>	<i>Merger</i>
<i>Referral</i>	Austria (federal), Flanders (Belgium)	Slovenia			
<i>Service provision</i>		Romania, Switzerland	[Poland], Finland	[The Netherlands]	
<i>Monitoring and sanctions</i>	Province of Vienna (Austria)				
<i>Full case management</i>			France, Germany, [Norway]	Portugal	Denmark, Ireland, [UK], Basque Country (Spain)

Note: The countries listed in square brackets were included in the comparative study, but not in the sample of detailed case studies.

The detailed descriptions of the reform episodes were prepared by country coordinators in each of the case study countries. Following initial desk research, information on the applicable reform process was collected through 12–17 semi-structured interviews per country with the following stakeholders: (a) government officials; (b) partner organisations, such as NGOs delivering social services or employment services; (c) trade unions; d) employers’ organisations; (e) political parties; (f) independent experts; and (g) representatives of service users and service providers.

The **assessment of the costs and benefits** of reform episodes was based on counterfactual estimates of the impact of the reform on re-employment outcomes and administrative data on the costs. For Austria, Germany and Ireland, we relied on existing evaluation studies, while for Denmark, Slovenia and Spain, we prepared our own impact estimates.

The **comparative analysis** was based on the comparison of less and more successful reform episodes, while controlling the most important institutional variables. In this analysis, a reform episode was considered successful if it achieved a net improvement in at least one (or several) of the outcome indicators relating to re-employment rates, poverty, user satisfaction or in other outcomes defined as a goal by the designer of the reform. In order to be able to identify obstacles in the design, as opposed to the implementation stage of the reform, we considered the first concept of the reform initiative as an intermediate output of the policy-making process.

The analysis was based on the reform descriptions prepared by country coordinators, and a dataset that includes comparable information on the main features and outcomes of the reform episodes in a quantified manner. Quantitative results were supplemented with qualitative information obtained from the stakeholder interviews and the literature review.

Building on the analyses described above, we presented two **reform pathways** for improving the co-ordination of employment services and social services for minimum income recipients, while taking into account the existing institutional context.

The costs and benefits of reforms

The empirical analysis of the effects of service integration episodes showed that few reforms have been systematically monitored and evaluated. As a result, despite the variety of recent reforms, there is relatively little reliable evidence on their cost effectiveness.

The limited available evidence compiled or generated by this study suggests that integration reforms rarely generate fiscal savings in the short term, however, the setup costs of these reforms are also relatively modest.

Two reforms that led to substantive short-term gains involved a major re-design of the approach to activating minimum income recipients. These reforms were implemented in the Basque Country (Spain) and the UK. Furthermore, it seems that service integration leads to more positive outcomes and higher monetary gains when public employment services (PES) take the lead in the integration process and is the main institution involved in the activation of minimum income recipients (as in the Basque Country (Spain) or in the co-operative job centres in Germany).

Drivers and barriers: results of the comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has refined and extended the existing evidence on what drives successful reforms.

During the first phase, or the agenda-setting phase of the policy cycle, there is a high potential for political disunity in the institutional structure, which can be compensated by cross-party consensus rooted in a consensual political culture or pressure caused by an economic crisis. The government needs to endorse at least one of the underlying aims of service integration. The goals of activation and labour market integration were endorsed by the government in almost all cases. Fragmentation of the initial institutional setup of employment and/or social services could hamper a successful design if the goal of the reform is overly ambitious. Lastly, the outcome of the first phase depends on the quality of governance. Support from international organisations can make up for poor-quality public administration.

During the second phase, when the policy is implemented, the initial setup and local capacities are important drivers of the outcome. The difficulties posed by fragmented institutional setup may be compensated by local expertise, a strong tradition of cooperation at the local level, and consultation with stakeholders during the design phase. Allowing sufficient time to implement the reform is effective, but time pressure does not necessarily lead to failure if local expertise is available and/or political commitment (and pressure) to achieve results is high. Poor monitoring and lack of piloting and evaluation tends to lead to failure or limited results.

Several reform episodes (Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and Spain) achieved an improvement in both employment and poverty outcomes. We could not identify any design features that would determine success in employment outcomes in all cases, however, two of the main design elements (ensuring adequate staffing and improvements in information sharing) seem to be important. What is most important is that almost all the reform episodes involved a strengthening of the activation approach towards minimum income recipients, and we found no indication that this would automatically lead to an increase in poverty. This implies that service integration itself may yield improvements in poverty and that it is possible to design reforms that improve both poverty and employment outcomes.

Two pathways for reform

The study outlines two reform pathways that have the potential to be most effective in contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of social services aiming at the activation of minimum income recipients in the labour market. Based on the case studies and the comparative analysis, we identified features in the reform process that are likely to be applicable to all countries (within and outside the sample), as well as features or elements that are dependent on certain country-specific contexts. In order to ensure that they are concrete and relevant for all countries, two versions of pathways to reform were elaborated, by reference notably to the initial status quo of service provision and the arrangements to be achieved by the reform. It is important to note that the pathways are defined as ideal types showing two contrasting models for integrating services, while existing institutional arrangements represent varying degrees and forms of co-ordination between services.

In proposing these two pathways, we separate the reform process into four stages: (a) goal-setting; (b) planning/design; (c) implementation; (d) and monitoring. In Pathway 1, the integration of services spans several policy areas and covers most aspects of case management. Pathway 1 also entails major institutional changes, such as mergers of earlier independent agencies, and implies a change in the distribution of tasks between the State and local government. Reform episodes that are typical of this model include the Basque Country (Spain), Ireland, Germany and the UK. Pathway 2 is built on more or less institutionalised cooperation, but is embedded in the existing institutional setting and characterised by considerable local leeway and variation (France, the Netherlands, Romania and Switzerland). In some countries, elements for both models can be found, for example, Slovenia.

The two pathways of integrated services might provide inspiration for countries that have not yet implemented integrated services. Pathway 1 may be more relevant for countries where existing services are relatively highly developed and are accessible, and the reform capacity of public administration is relatively high. Pathway 2 may serve as a model for countries where employment services and/or social services are less developed or highly fragmented, and for countries where the capacity to implement complex institutional reforms is constrained by constitutional barriers or the limited capacities of public administration.

Recommendations

Based on the above analyses, we outline detailed recommendations for each phase of the policy cycle and for both national- and EU-level policymakers.

At the national level, the main focus of the agenda-setting phase is that the goal of the reform should be chosen in view of the existing institutional setup and the reform capacity of the government. Integration may also not be a top priority in countries where available social services are limited both in terms of quality and accessibility.

For the planning and design phase, the recommendations highlight the data requirements of good design and provide several suggestions for particular design choices appropriate to the most common institutional arrangements in Member States. A general recommendation applicable in all contexts is that stakeholders should have already been consulted during the design phase and that the newly established services should be adequately staffed in order to ensure that caseloads remain manageable.

For the implementation phase, the recommendations focus mainly on the importance of piloting and monitoring, the harmonisation of goals between the cooperating entities, and skills development of staff. We also offer some insights into the more technical, but nevertheless crucial, aspects, such as addressing legal barriers and developing IT infrastructure for data management.

For the monitoring and evaluation phase, the recommendations outline the data requirements, the importance of monitoring, and certain concrete suggestions on how to set up reforms in a way that allows the calculation of counterfactual estimates on impacts.

At the EU-level, the recommendations aim at encouraging the Member States to provide effective integrated services, in particular through the use of systematic impact evaluations, mutual learning platforms, studies and assistance in the design of integrated systems. In all of these measures, it is important to consider the variety of existing institutional arrangements that tend to determine the optimal depth and breadth of a service integration reform.