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Stream 6: Labour market policy, activation and beyond

Stream convenors: Ludo Struyven (Leuven University) and Matthias Knuth
(University of Duisburg-Essen)

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.
Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.
Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12- C.I.F. Q4618001-D
Email: espanet2011@uv.es

Activation in the Austrian Social Assistance Scheme

Formal and Operational Transformation

STREAM 6: LABOUR MARKET POLICY, ACTIVATION AND BEYOND

Stream convenors: Ludo Struyven (Leuven University)

and Matthias Knuth (University of Duisburg-Essen)

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Sustainability and Transformation of European Social Policy

Contributed paper

Dr. Bettina Leibetseder
Bettina.leibetseder@jku.at
+43-732-2468-7167

Mag. Helga Kranewitter
Helga.kranewitter@jku.at
+43-732-2468-1333

Department of Social Policy
Johannes Kepler University
www.gespol.jku.at

Altenbergerstraße 69
4040 Linz
Austria

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.
Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.
Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12– C.I.F. Q4618001-D
Email: espanet2011@uv.es

The paper intends to scrutinise the ongoing reform in Austria on a formal and operational level. In September 2010 a 'Means-Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income' (MGMI) passed in the federal parliament, aligning the current nine provincial social assistance regulations with one another and promoting the objective to '*combat and avoid poverty and social exclusion*' and '*(re-)integrat[e] its recipients in the labour market*' in Austria (Art. 1 of the treaty between the federal state and the provinces). The major changes are twofold: Firstly, a national threshold will replace the nine current rates of the provinces and, secondly, the public employment service is intended to serve as entry point and activation agency for social assistance recipients categorised as fit for work. The first part of the paper describes the social assistance and activation system in the nine provinces. The second part will draw on empirical results of one study exemplifying the activation in two provincial social assistance schemes. The study is based on a sample of 500 face-to-face interviews in each province asking claimants and recipients about their experience of the activation policy at unemployment service centres and social assistance offices in mid 2010.

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1. Activation – a General Framework

In September 2010 a 'Means-Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income' (MGMI) was introduced to equalise the current nine provincial social assistance regulations promoting the objective to '*combat and avoid poverty and social exclusion*' and '*(re-)integrat[e] its recipients in the labour market*' in Austria (Art. 1 of the agreement between federal state and provinces, translated by the author). The major changes are twofold: Firstly, a national threshold will replace the nine current rates of the provinces and, secondly, the public employment service will serve as entry point and activation agency for social assistance recipients categorised as fit for work. Up to now, the Austrian welfare state has been based on a strictly institutionally and legally separated two-tier system of social insurance and social assistance benefits. Hence, poverty and social insurance policy are segregated on a formal and operational level, the former subject to regional legislation and the latter regulated nationally.

In Austria, the social assistance scheme is regulated on provincial level. Since September 2010, an agreement between the federal state and the nine provinces has been introducing a national minimum standard for all provinces step-by-step. Among other things, the reform aims at tighter activation policies for all social assistance recipients. Up until now, all provinces, and even the local communities in some provinces were entitled to establish their own system of activation. Recipients of a so-called 'full-payment' from the social assistance programme have to fulfil the requirements of the social assistance offices. Certain groups have to apply for both: unemployment insurance benefit/unemployment assistance benefit and social assistance benefits.¹ As the first does not incorporate a minimum income provision, claimants

¹ The duration of receipt of unemployment benefit is limited to a period from six months to a year, depending on the contributory period. Afterwards, one can apply for the income-tested unemployment assistance (Notstandshilfe), which takes into account the income (and not the assets) of the claimant and his/her partner or spouse (Badelt & Österle 2001). After a certain minimum insurance period, one can receive benefit, when one is able to work and willing to work (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection 2011). Within the last 25 years, the qualification periods, sanctions and controls have been increased. The terms of reasonability are tightened (Obinger & Tálos 2006, Tálos 2006) and nowadays an unemployed person has to be willing to take an acceptable job offer with a wage down to 75% of the previous earnings and vocational experience and skills can limit the search only within the first hundred days of unemployment. The unemployment (assistance) benefit is an amount of between half and 80% of the average net income in the last year of employment. In October 2009, 40% relied on the income-tested unemployment assistance.

of a low unemployment benefit apply for a top-up payment at the social assistance office up to the minimum income threshold. Therefore, claimants of social assistance and unemployment (assistance) benefits have to apply for a top up at the social assistance office and fulfil the eligibility requirements at both offices. The new legislation opens up the unemployment services for all social assistance recipients, which was previously at the local discretion of both schemes.

Thus, the Austrian welfare state is based on a strict institutionally and legally separated two-tier system of social insurance and social assistance benefits. Hence, poverty and social insurance policy are segregated, whereby poverty is subject to regional legislation and social insurance is a matter of national concern. The distinction reflects the bifurcation of labour and poverty issues in a Bismarckian regime. Social insurance applies to a large portion of the population and is treated as a right that is reflected in the contributory-based payments securing its status. Conversely, social assistance serves as a programme for a minority of the population, and is given to the poor on the principle of subsidiarity (Stelzer-Orthofer 1997, Obinger & Tálós 2010). The reform and the intake via the unemployment offices should limit this institutional bifurcation – such a shift should introduce a similar accessibility to the two benefits. Furthermore, the intake of recipients via the unemployment offices should move social assistance recipients towards the labour market. Thus, the reform intends to enforce activation for social assistance recipients.

Activation policies in a narrow sense define the (re-)integration of individuals into the labour market (Barbier & Ludwig-Wagnerhofer 2004). Such policies differ according to their degree of coercion and choice. Nevertheless, such ‘workfare’ or activation programmes are an integral part of all modernised social assistance policies (Hanesch et al 2001, Lødemel & Trickey 2000, Gilbert 2004), aim to reduce social exclusion and enhance economic participation (Fawcett et al 2010). Conversely, activation policy can lead to social exclusion, if one is no longer entitled to a benefit because one cannot fulfil the conditions. Social assistance and the new means-tested guaranteed minimum income scheme require participation and willingness to work from recipients. In some provinces, the benefit can be reduced by an amount up to the total

The average unemployment benefit averages 810 Euro and the unemployment assistance benefit 617 Euro (www.bmask.gv.at).

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.
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Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12– C.I.F. Q4618001-D
Email: espanet2011@uv.es

amount if recipients do not follow the regulations. Hence, the social right to a benefit is restricted in Austria within the old and the new legislation. It allows for a conditionality: only those are eligible, who search for a job and fulfil distinct requirements.

The policy changes aim to increase contact to the labour market. One aim is an increased inter-agency collaboration in relation to activation policies (Berkel & Borghi 2008). As Berkel (2010) and Carmel and Papadopolous (2009) recently argued, two types of reform exist in an activation policy. Firstly, formal policy reform changes the content of social policy. The aims are transformed and activation policy is introduced as the highest priority. Secondly, activation policy also implies a modification on the operational level that requires a restructuring of the service provision. An institutional change imposes a new form of governance on the unemployed. Such reform can be analysed from both an organisational and street-level perspective (Berkel & Borghi 2008) covering the organisational aspects and the daily interactions at the office between caseworkers and claimants. Street level bureaucracy acts as an intermediary institution between claimants and formal policy reform (Lipsky 1980). However, to study the reform on an operational level, one has to take into account the experiences of the claimants. One cannot understand a transformation fully without looking to this arena. In a rather strict two-tier system of social insurance and social assistance such as in Austria (Obinger and Tálos 2010), a closer look at the micro level can give new insight into the situation. Thus, it contributes to the literature on activation policies and governance of unemployed dealing the issue from a citizen's point of view (Berkel and Borghi 2008, 2007).

Research Question

In general, two types of reform exist in an activation policy as stated above: the formal policy reform changes and a modification on the operational level. This paper describes the ongoing reform and the current state of implementation in the provinces in regard to activation on formal level, which is covered by the first research question. The second research question covers the perspective and experience of claimants, taking into account micro data of a quantitative survey towards activation: It covers two dimensions of activation labelled as support and pressure. The objective here is to check, whether the system still constitutes

'localized, discretionary relief' (Gough 1997) in relation to work obligations. The third question takes into account the accessibility for services of social assistance recipients offered by the unemployment office. Another aim of the new legislation is an increase in accessibility and support by the job centre. Each MGMI recipient categorized as fit for work must be registered at the job centre and can access trainings. Finally, the transformative aspect of the new legislation is compared with the empirical results of the face-to-face interviews under the previous system.

Method

This paper will first provide an overview of the (previous) social assistance legislation and the minimum requirement of the Means-Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income on a national level in relation to activation. Thus, comparing the legal regulations of each province in the former social assistance scheme with the minimum regulations of the new scheme describing the formal level. The new scheme provides a national minimum standard for new provincial legislations. The two provinces, Styria and Upper Austria, are investigated in greater depth. The new provincial regulations that take into account the requirements of the national guideline have still not been fully implemented – therefore, the formal analysis will take into account only the national guideline and not the new adapted provincial regulations.

The study consists of two quantitative waves², one before and one after the implementation of the new legislation. The results of the first survey concerning the activation of social assistance recipients and claimants are presented in this paper, covering recipients of the social assistance regulations of the two provinces. Overall, the first quantitative questionnaire asked approximately 1,100 persons applying for a benefit at the local social assistance office out of

² In October this year, a qualitative phase will begin taking into account distinct regions in each province. Four case studies should give a thorough idea of the actual changes on the street level in each province. Clients, caseworkers and managers will be interviewed using semi-structured interviews. On some days, a researcher will sit in when clients and caseworkers engage in discussions about the benefit receipt. In addition, an online survey provides an overview of all regions in each province. The local job centres and social assistance administrations (on regional and communal level) are asked to answer a questionnaire about changes in the administration and the collaboration between job centre and social assistance. Furthermore, vignettes are included to compare practices in calculating benefits, requirement of documents and conditionality in relation to employment (see Appendix for more information on the research outline).

7,000 recipients in both provinces in 2010. Some interviews are excluded as dropouts and, thus, a total of 1,072 interviews are included in the data³.

To obtain the interviews, interviewers asked claimants and recipients at the local social assistance offices (at regional and communal offices) to answer the questionnaire face-to-face. Not all of the recipients actually attend appointments at the local office each month. Permanent recipients, due to a disability or old age, obtain a regular payment into their bank account; thus, those persons are underrepresented in this study, as they attend appointments on a less frequent basis. These clients do not have to be willing to work and do not constitute the group of concern for the new legislation and, therefore, this study. Nevertheless, we cannot check this aspect of representativeness and weight the data accordingly, as we do not know the share of so-called 'permanent' social assistance recipients in the population.

The provinces provided us with the number of recipients in each region for 2009. Thus, the representativeness of the sample could be ensured in relation to rural and urban areas, as a specific minimum number of interviews in each area were carried out. In the case of gender, the data about the population of the provinces does provide some statistics. Unfortunately, the data gives insufficient information about individuals in a household, taking into account only the head of the household, who is in in most two-adult households a male person. Consequently, as the weight of gender is close to 1, weighted or unweighted data can be regarded as being close to representative. Other socio-demographic criteria are not available to control further issues of representativeness.

Now, the legislative implementation of activation is described. Then, the results of the quantitative survey of claimants and recipients of social assistance in relation to activation are presented. Finally, the transformative aspect of the new legislation is compared with the empirical results of the face-to-face interviews under the previous system.

³ For more information on the sample see Appendix.

2. The Formal Level: Social Assistance and Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income and Activation

Activation, as described in chapter one, has a narrow definition. In a broad sense, activation refers to all aspects of promoting labour market participation (Barbier & Ludwig-Wagnerhofer 2004). One aspect is the principle of less eligibility (Polanyi 2001), as social assistance always enforced a strict work-first policy for groups fit for work. It stipulated that the level of benefit should be far below the minimum wage in low qualified jobs. Social assistance legislation allows for higher benefits for long-term recipients who are unfit for work, and for single parents. Persons categorised as fit for work obtain a lower benefit. During the legislative process on national level in 2010, political discussions enforced a reduction of benefit payments from 14 to 12 monthly payments to reinforce the principle of less eligibility in the Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income. The conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) argued that the benefit has to be well below the poverty threshold to enforce an incentive to work under the new legislation (Leibetseder & Kranewitter 2010).⁴

Activation in the Provincial and National Regulations

Activation in a narrow sense circumscribes the regulations within the social assistance legislation and the Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income covering aspects of conditionality. The legal changes within the system are still not fully implemented in all nine provinces (see table below). The first stage was a new implementation to overcome the poor laws, the second stage involves a focus on bringing recipients back into work and the third stage allows for easier access and lower recourse liabilities in some provinces. The quantitative results, presented in the next chapter, describe the system of stage two and three in Styria and Upper Austria. Nevertheless, the new legislation between the provinces and the national

⁴ Another aspect of activation is the stigmatising application procedure, when one takes into account that, depending on the province, between 0.40 and 5 per cent of the population receive social assistance (Leibetseder & Kranewitter 2010) and half to two-thirds of all eligible persons do not claim social assistance (Fuchs 2009). Another 'activating' aspect might be reimbursement liability. In some provinces, claimants and even close relatives are liable to pay a benefit back when they obtain sufficient income (Pfeil 2001, 2007a). (As the first province, Vienna abolished the recourse liability in the 1970s and has the highest percentage of social assistance recipients in the population (see table 1). Carinthia and Styria abolished the recourse liability in the last three years.) However, some claimants might not take up a job, as they have to pay back the benefit when they reach a certain wage level (Biffel 2007). Thus, reimbursement liabilities might inhibit to get on the welfare role but might inhibit to get off the welfare role again and work in both ways. The new legislation brings an end to the reimbursement liability and allows participants to entering the system earlier and leave it again. (Styria backed out of this and reintroduced reimbursement liability in 2011.).

government allows for a provincial leeway concerning activation. Thus, whether it constitutes a tighter policy coordination between the two tiers, a tighter coordination of public employment offices and social assistance offices or a single gateway for all claimants of working age in the provinces cannot be stated yet and is the research question in an ongoing study..

Table 1: Social Assistance Acts of the Provinces

	1st social assistance act Poverty Alleviation	2nd social assistance act Activation	3rd social assistance act Minimum Security	4th Means-Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income
Burgenland	1975	2000	-	1.9.2010**
Carinthia	1974	1996 ¹⁾	2007	1.1.2011
Lower Austria	1974	2000	-	1.9.2010
Upper Austria	1973	1998	-	1.10.2011***
Salzburg	1975	2000	-	1.9.2010
Styria	1977	1998	2008	1.3.2011
Tyrol	1973	1999	2006	1.9.2010**
Vorarlberg	1971	1998 ¹⁾	-	1.9.2010**
Vienna	1973	structural changes (2000)		1.9.2010

Sources: Pfeil 2001, 18-19 & Dimmel 2003b, 121-136, Pfeil 2007, 121, ris.bn.s..gv.at

*re-announcement and changes

**Retroactive introduction

***Expected introduction

Still, one has to bear in mind that the new legislation does not abolish the current system of unemployment insurance and unemployment assistance benefits. Unemployed receiving social insurance benefits still have to obtain a top up payment by the social assistance office in case of a low benefit and might still have to fulfil the conditions of both administrations relating to job seeking. Now, we will describe the general job search requirements and then aspects of sanctions and support within the provincial regulations and the new national framework.

Job Search Conditionality

The Austrian social assistance scheme always requires the willingness to work ('Einsatz der eigenen Kräfte'); as a prerequisite to be eligible for a benefit, recipients have to search for employment. Activation was implemented as part of the legislation in the mid-1990s in social assistance legislation. During this period, social assistance systems experienced an increase in claimants who were fit to work and who had not acquired an entitlement or sufficient level of benefit in the case of unemployment (Leibetseder & Woltran 2011). Since then, social assistance recipients have to, in some provinces, participate in programmes or projects, most

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.

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Email: espanet2011@uv.es

of the time on a voluntary basis. However, due to the principle of individualised support, the administration has to examine multiple criteria for each claimant and has to scrutinise the personal and family situation in-depth. In all regulations health, age and childcare responsibilities can limit the general principle that one has to take up any job offered. Some provinces allow for restrictions in the case of education or training or – under specific circumstances – previous employment status. Two provinces define a job as ‘not unreasonable’, when it offers a lower pay, takes longer to travel to the workplace or enforces a de-qualification of the recipient compared to the previous employment. Still, a person can be exempted for household chores in a few provinces. These regulations allow the administration discretionary interpretation. Nevertheless, certain strict rules emphasise that disability, childcare responsibilities (where an adequate childcare facility is not accessible) and the social insurance legislation’s pension age serve as limits for the requirement of willingness to work (see table below). Some provinces form their regulations very explicit, others allow for a higher degree of administrative discretion and just provide a broad definition.

The national regulation for a Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income allows for the implementation of the regulations of the unemployment insurance legislation, which are less personalised and do not make allowance for cases to be handled on an individual basis (qualification and payment protection, maximum travel time, minimum availability of 20 hours per week, etc.). Thus, benefit recipients now have to comply with the unemployment legislation regarding a reasonable job and exemption of work obligation and attend regular appointments at the jobcentre. Still, the provinces are allowed a distinct degree of latitude in the re-introduction of the former regulations of the social assistance legislation. In the case of childcare responsibilities, one is entitled to a non-means-tested childcare benefit (depending on the level of benefit, between one and 2.5 years) and a means tested top-up payment (up to a year). Thus, top-up payments or a full benefit of the means-tested guaranteed minimum income begin only after the child reaches at least the age of one year. Depending on the province and the accessibility of day care, the conditionality might take effect earlier in one region than another. As the table below shows, some provinces specify the criteria in detail, whereas others allow for a high degree of discretion.

Table 2: Criteria for Requirement to Search for a Job

Administration has to take into account on an individualised basis										
	Bgld	Carinthia	Lower Austria	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Styria	Tyrol	Vibg	Vien-na	MGMI*
Age	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Unemployment Insurance Legislation
Health	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Education		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Qualification		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Previous Employment				X						
Care (Elderly)	family relationships	care responsibilities	family duties	X			X	X		
Child Care				X	X	X	X	X	X	
household				X			X	X		
"not unreasonable"	X		X							
Exemption of Work Obligation										
Disability	X	X	see above	X		X	see above	see above	X	see above
Pension Age (social insurance)	X	X		60 years old	X	X			X	X
child care		less than 3 years old, child care facility*		less than 3 years old, child care facility*		single parent 2 years, others 3 years, child care facility*			single parent 2 years	child below 3, child care facility*
Care (Frail, Elderly)		see above		care allowance						minimum level 3 of care allowance
Care of Dying Persons		X								X

Source: Leibetseder / Woltran 2011

*In cases where an adequate child care facility is available, one has to be willing to work earlier.

Sanctions

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 Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.
 Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12– C.I.F. Q4618001-D
 Email: espanet2011@uv.es

In cases where there is an unwillingness to work, each province allows for the benefit to be reduced: either partly or by the full amount. In most of the provinces, the support for other household members must be sustained or a minimum of subsistence upheld. The Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income (MGMI) also enforces such a regulation but requires a written warning beforehand. A full cut of the benefit is only sanctioned as a last resort and requires a thorough argumentation on the part of the administration. In contrast, the unemployment social insurance legislation, which allows for the benefit to be sanctioned for a period of six or eight weeks, the MGMI does not state any minimum or maximum period.

Table 3: Sanctions

	<i>Burgen-land</i>	<i>Carint-hia</i>	<i>Lower Austria</i>	<i>Upper Aus</i>	<i>Salzbur-g</i>	<i>Styria</i>	<i>Tyrol</i>	<i>Vorarlberg</i>	<i>Vie-nna</i>	MGMI*
written notice beforehand										X
cut in steps				X						X
cut of parts	X	X (X		up to a minimum	up to a minimum	up to a minimum		
cut up to half of the benefit									X	X
total cut of benefit	X		X	X	X					only in specific circumstances
covering food		X								
covering accommodation		X								X
covering minimum of dependent	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X

Data: Leibetseder / Woltran 2011

Taking into account the two provinces of the empirical study, one can compare the social assistance regulations concerning work obligation in more detail. In Upper Austria, the benefit can be cut by an amount of up to the total amount, can be refused to be granted at all or just be granted partially, if the claimant or recipient does not show 'considered effort' to find employment. In contrast, where a recipient does not take up a job offer, the Styrian legislation allows for reduction down to the essential amount.

Support

Up until the introduction of the MGMI, the recipients were not entitled to enter the training and programmes offered by the job centres if they did not obtain a top-up payment from the unemployment insurance scheme. Thus, they could only rely on the services on a discretionary basis depending on the caseworker and regional practices. The MGMI tightens the administrative ties between the job centres and social assistance offices: All MGMI's recipients are entitled to the services of the job centre. The job centre has to enter into a contract with the recipients and in addition checks the recipient's progress toward employment. All information about sanctions or instances where an appointment is missed has been passed on to the social assistance office, which may introduce a faster and stricter sanction regime than the social assistance office. The MGMI also allows for small additional income and ends the recourse liability of the claimant in case of employment to lower the so-called poverty trap.

Most of the provinces allow for tapered regulations, when someone enters employment and just obtains a low income. Tyrol, Upper Austria and Carinthia also specify projects for labour market reintegration fostering protected employment in a supported environment (Leibetseder & Woltran 2011). Both provinces enable specific support for social assistance recipients. Upper Austria introduced a tapered regulation, whereas long-term recipients can earn a low amount each month without deduction from their benefit. Furthermore, the act includes a so-called 'help towards work' (Hilfe zur Arbeit) option. The legal requirements are that it is only for recipients who cannot find any employment, even if they really look for work, as they are hardly employable. The aim is to ease reintegration into employment. The job should fit the abilities and needs of the recipients. The reintegration measures are limited in duration and the weekly hours of an 'employee' are reduced to two thirds compared to a regular employee. However, the wages have to be paid according to the labour law regulations. Conversely, the Styrian social assistance act just allows for the notion that '*the ability of the recipient to be independent from the assistance should be fostered in particular.*'

3. Empirical Results Concerning the Operational Level

Conditionality of the Social Assistance Office

It should be taken into account that social assistance is a benefit of last resort; thus, persons with a stable full-time employment obtain sufficient support via the social insurance scheme. The two provinces indicate a distinct approach towards their clients' job search. In Upper Austria, a larger proportion has to search for an employment compared to Styria.

Table 4: Requirement of Job Search at the Social Assistance Office

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		p (chi ²)*
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	180	37.6	147	27.2	327	32.1	0.000**
no	236	49.3	316	58.5	552	54.2	
don't know	63	13.2	77	14.3	140	13.7	
total	479	100.0	540	100.0	1019	100.0	

* Without the category 'don't know'.

First of all, we describe the aspects of support at the social assistance offices and then pressure. Then, we compare these two aspects and provide an index of conditionality integration support and pressure. A regression is provided for the index of support, pressure and pressure & support. Afterwards, we outline a linear regression model, describing the job search requirement at the social assistance office and providing further insight. Finally, we discuss the findings concerning job search requirement and support at the jobcentre.

Support

However, one can look at the specific requirements of the social assistance office asking those respondents obliged to look for an employment. In total, the questionnaire asked ten questions concerning support and requirements of the job search. The claimants have to answer whether they talk with the caseworker about their employment situation at all. Such discussions do not occur regularly – only a third of the respondents claimed that they had experienced such conversations at all. Out of those respondents, most of them have discussed their qualifications and chances to find a job with the caseworker

To a lesser degree, the participation in programmes seems to be on the agenda of the interaction between caseworkers and social assistance recipients. Only 51 respondents claim that the caseworker talked with them about the participation in a project and just 18 respondents actually took part in one.

Table 5: Support at the Social Assistance Office

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		
Did you discuss your employment situation in depth? P (chi2)* = 0.000							
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	77	41.8	31	21.4	108	32.8	
no	106	57.6	114	78.6	220	66.9	
don't know	1	0.5	0	0.0	1	0.3	
total	184	100.0	145	100.0	329	100.0	
If yes:	Did you talk about your qualifications and abilities? (n.s.: 3), p (chi2)* = 0.319						
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	62	80.5	20	71.4	82	78.1	
no	15	19.5	8	28.6	23	21.9	
don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	
total	77	100.0	28	100.0	105	100.0	
	Did you talk about your chances to find a job or training (n.s.: 5). p (chi2)* = 0.282						
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	50	65.8	21	77.8	71	68.9	
no	25	32.9	6	22.2	31	30.1	
don't know	1	1.3	0	0.0	1	1.0	
total	76	100.0	27	100.0	103	100.0	
	Did you talk about the participation in projects / programmes or trainings? (n.s.: 2), p (chi2)* = 0.028						
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	36	19.7	15	10.6	51	15.7	
no	145	79.2	124	87.3	269	82.8	
don't know	2	1.1	3	2.1	5	1.5	
total	183	100.0	12	100.0	325	100.0	
If yes:	Did you participate in a project/programme or training ? (n.s.: 5), p (Cramer's V)*= 0.000						
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	14	40.0	4	36.4	18	39.1	
no	21	60.0	6	54.5	27	58.7	
don't know	0	0.0	1	9.1	1	2.2	
total	35	100.0	11	100.0	46	100.0	

* without 'don't know' and 'not stated'

Pressure

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.
 Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.
 Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12- C.I.F. Q4618001-D
 Email: espanet2011@uv.es

In contrast, coercion seems to be a more widespread method used by caseworkers in the social assistance office. At least, a higher percentage has to display the job centre's appointment card to the caseworker at the social assistance office proving that he/she attended meetings at the job centre. Furthermore, clients have to hand in their applications for job offers in newspapers as well as and unsolicited job offers. Fewer recipients have to apply for proposed positions. Nevertheless, a rather stigmatising practice is the collection of company stamps, whereby the recipient has to ask in person for a job at a company and verify his/her job search efforts by obtaining a stamp in a personal booklet or a booklet issued by the social assistance office, which is still common in both provinces and highly stigmatising. More than half of the claimants still have to fulfil that condition in Upper Austria. Common seems to be the knowledge of non-compliance with the job search demands – seven out of ten respondents in both province know that sanctions can be imposed. This is the only item for which the differences between the responses do not indicate a distinction between the provinces. Less than 20 per cent have been threatened or experienced a full cut, a partial cut or a delay of benefit payment.

Table 6: Pressure towards job search at the Social Assistance Office

Do you have to ...		Upper Austria		Styria		total		p (chi2)*
		count	%	count	%	count	%	
... show the job centre's appointment card job centre to the caseworkers at the social assistance office? (4 n.s.)	yes	143	79	97	68	240	74	<u>0.030</u>
	no	33	18	40	28	73	23	
	don't know	4	2	6	4	10	3	
	total	180	100	142	143	323	100	
...show unsolicited applications / applications for job offers in newspapers, etc.? (8 n.s.)	yes	144	82	38	28	182	58	0.000
	no	31	17	98	72	129	42	
	don't know	1	1	0	0	1	0	
	total	176	100	137	100	313	100	
... collect company stamps? (8 n.s.)	yes	98	54	24	17	122	38	0.000
	no	78	43	113	80	191	59	
	don't know	5	3	5	3	10	3	
	total	182	100	142	100	323	100	
... apply for proposed job offers/ at proposed companies? (8 n.s.)	yes	54	30	10	7	64	19	0.000
	no	119	66	125	88	244	75	
	don't know	8	4	7	5	15	5	
	total	181	100	142	100	323	100	
If you do not comply with the requirements, do have to reckon with a full cut, deduction or delay of benefit payment?	yes	127	71	96	69	223	70	0.572
	no	29	16	26	19	55	17	
	don't know	23	13	17	12	40	13	
	total	179	100	139	100	318	100	
Have you ever been threatened with full cut, deduction or delay of benefit	threatened	23	12,7	13	9,3	36	11,2	0.158*
	experienced	9	5,0	14	10,0	23	7,2	

payment? Did you experience one? (n.s. 2)	no	149	82,3	111	79,3	260	81,0	**
	don't know	0	0,0	2	1,4	2	0,6	
	total	181	100,0	140	100,0	321	100,0	

* without categories 'don't know' and 'not stated', ** Cramer's V

Index of Conditionality

As a result, one can calculate an index of conditionality consisting out of five items for support and five items for pressure (see table below). In total, the index of conditionality computes out of ten items: Each item equalises as one, when the administration requires the recipient to do so, and zero, when it does not enforce such conditionality.⁵

⁵ The distinction between the items integrated in the indexes is checked by a factor analysis (see Appendix for details).

Table 7: Index of Conditionality

Index	Items
Support (five items)	longer talk about job search talk about participation in courses/programs/ talk about professional qualification talks about personal chances to find a job participation in courses
Pressure (five items)	presentation of job centre's appointment card unsolicited applications / applications for job offers in newspapers collection of company stamps application for recommended job offers/companies reckoning with cut, deduction or revoking of benefit
Support & Pressure (ten items)	5 items for support and 5 items for pressure

Four of the respondents had to fulfil all ten requirements. In contrast, one tenth of the interviewees do not have to do anything and experience neither support nor pressure at the social assistance office. Most of the respondents have to comply with two to five items. Almost two thirds of the respondents do not gain any support for job search and only a third is supported with one item. In contrast, only 15% of the respondents do not have to comply with any item indicating pressure and 13% of the respondents have to cope with five and a quarter, with four items of pressure. In summary, an index such as this provides support to the claim that social assistance enforces activation policy with the stick and not with the carrot.

Table 8: Index Support, Pressure and Support & Pressure*

	Support		Pressure		Support & Pressure	
	count	%	count	%	count	%
no item	200	64.7	40	15.0	27	10.6
one item	18	5.8	11	4.1	12	4.7
two Items	22	7.1	64	24.1	46	18.1
three Items	42	13.6	49	18.4	40	15.7
four Items	17	5.5	68	25.6	44	17.3
five Items	10	3.2	34	12.8	33	13.0
six Items					17	6.7
seven Items					13	5.1
eight Items					13	5.1
nine Items					5	2.0
ten Items					4	1.6
total*	309	100.0	266	100.0	254	100.0

* without 'don't know' and 'not stated', ** as n.s. and don't know are excluded, N is different in each index

Taking into account some socio-demographic criteria, all three indexes show significances. Of course, the criterion 'province' once again indicates a stricter regime of support and support & pressure in Upper Austria. People living in urban areas have to comply with more items of the index pressure. In addition, unemployed persons experience more pressure in comparison to persons incapable of work. These experience more support, which is not significant. Men and older respondents are more supported in comparison to women and younger respondents; nevertheless, the two other indexes do not show any significance. All other socio-demographic criteria do not indicate any significance.

Table 9: Support, Pressure and Support & Pressure and Socio-Demographic Criteria

		N	Mean	Standard Dev.	Levene-Test	t-test
Support & Pressure	Upper Austria	145	4.62	2.39	.004	.000
	Styria	109	2.54	1.80		
Pressure	Upper Austria	148	3.33	1.40	.762	.000
	Styria	118	1.99	1.46		
Support	Upper Austria	178	1.29	1.67	.000	.000
	Styria	131	0.58	1.14		
Support & Pressure	Urban	154	4.10	2.39	.734	.002
	Rural	100	3.16	2.27		
Pressure	Urban	162	3.01	1.45	.044	.001
	Rural	104	2.32	1.66		
Support	Urban	192	1.08	1.57	.038	.155
	Rural	117	0.84	1.40		
Support & Pressure	Male	100	4.03	2.42	.982	.107
	Female	154	3.53	2.35		
Pressure	Male	104	2.88	1.49	.387	.243
	Female	162	2.65	1.62		
Support	Male	128	1.20	1.62	.001	.035
	Female	180	0.83	1.41		
Support & Pressure	No Migration	180	3.53	2.29	.414	.054
	With Migration	74	4.20	2.57		
Pressure	No Migration	189	2.62	1.55	.868	.059
	With Migration	77	3.03	1.60		
Support	No Migration	215	0.91	1.46	.111	.159
	With Migration	94	1.18	1.61		
Support & Pressure	No Child	160	3.70	2.45	.252	.802
	With Child	94	3.78	2.29		
Pressure	No Child	167	2.68	1.50	.158	.432
	With Child	99	2.84	1.68		
Support	No Child	198	1.03	1.57	.298	.577
	With Child	111	0.93	1.41		

Support & Pressure	One adult	174	3.63	2.42	.472	.344
	More than one adult	80	3.94	2.31		
Pressure	One adult	179	2.63	1.55	.747	.116
	More than one adult	87	2.95	1.61		
Support	One adult	209	1.01	1.55	.351	.686
	More than one adult	100	0.94	1.43		
Support & Pressure	Up to 45 Years	183	3.68	2.32	.314	.604
	Above 45 Years	71	3.86	2.57		
Pressure	Up to 45 Years	190	2.79	1.49	.017	.377
	Above 45 Years	76	2.59	1.75		
Support	Up to 45 Years	231	0.87	1.45	.006	.030
	Above 45 Years	78	1.33	1.65		
Support & Pressure	Unemployed	201	3.84	2.31	.018	.601
	Incapable of work	33	3.55	3.02		
Pressure	Unemployed	208	2.86	1.52	.045	.034
	Incapable of work	36	2.25	1.86		
Support	Unemployed	242	0.98	1.49	.008	.271
	Incapable of work	44	1.30	1.79		

t-test for Equality of means (significance, 2-tailed): in case of the insignificant Levene's test, one takes the result of the modified t-test for the equality of means in SPSS

A regression allows explanations to be sought as to why someone has experienced a higher degree of pressure, support or pressure & support. Thus, within the first trials of those models, some socio-demographic variables are excluded, as they are not part of any model: education (below or at minimum education, more than minimum education, A-levels and above – as dummy variables), household with/without children, one- or more than one-person household, single or couple, and migration background. Thus, in all three models, the following independent variables are included: province (Upper Austria and Styria as predictor), urban or rural area (as predictor), age, gender (male and female as predictor), activity status (employed, unemployed and incapable of work either due to age, disability or care responsibilities as dummy variable), and health status (excellent as 1, good as 2, average as 3, bad as 4, very bad as 5). All models exclude respondents above 65 years old and without unstated health status.

Within some trials, the high degree of collinearity between health and age lead to the exclusion of age and inclusion of health in the model, as the multiple correlations coefficient does not decrease notably and health stays significant as an unstandardized coefficient in contrast to age. The model of pressure shows that a lower health status reduces the pressure. In Styria and rural areas, social assistance recipients have a lower pressure. Overall, the model can explain pressure well and also allows for an explanation of variance.

The model concerning support cannot explain sufficiently at all. Step-by-step variables are included and excluded, but health, urban and rural does not show any significance nor explanation. Finally, gender and province stay in the model as significant. At best, one can state that support is accessible by chance for social assistance recipients. Due to the higher degree of pressure, the model of support & pressure catches the pressure, but includes gender too. In addition, province allows for an impact and, once again, urban and rural area.

Table 10: Regression Analysis for Indexes

	Pressure	Support	Pressure & Support
	B (Sig)	B (Sig)	B (Sig)
(constant)	6.289	2.820	8.941
health status	-0.154 (0.033)	0.030 (0.399)	-0.108 (0.330)
Province – Styria	-1.334 (0.000)	-0.687 (0.000)	-2.046 (0.000)
Urban – Rural	-0.539 (0.003)	-0.149 (0.670)	-0.703 (0.013)
Gender - Female	-0.227 (0.200)	-0.417 (.0016)	-0.540 (0.50)
R	0.483	0.274	0.477
R Square	0.233	0.075	0.227
N	262	305	250

Job Search Requirement at the Social Assistance Office

Finally, one looks on the conditionality of job search with logistic regression on job search activity in case of the social assistance administration, which variables can explain a non-job search requirement. Again all respondents above 65 years old and employed people are excluded from the model. After the first trials, certain variables are excluded: education (below or at minimum education, more than minimum education, A-levels and above), household with/without children, single or couple, one- or more than one-person household and migration background.

Thus, in the model, the following independent variables are included: age up to 65, province (Upper Austria and Styria as predictor), gender (male and female as predictor), activity status (unemployed and incapable of work either due to age, disability or care responsibilities as predictor), urban and rural areas (rural as predictor) benefit recipient of social assistance (no benefit recipient as predictor) and health status (excellent as 1, good as 2, average as 3, bad as

4, very bad as 5). Within this model, the province Upper Austria lowers the odds of non-job search and urban area increases the odds of job search. Once again, regional factors do allow for an explanation of job search activity. Of course, the receipt of a benefit lowers the odds of non-job search, as someone obtaining a benefit is required to search. Where someone states his/her status as unemployed, the odds of non-job search are significantly lower than someone describing him/herself as incapable of work. Again, age and health status require careful interpretation.⁶ Nevertheless, age provides significant impact in the model, whereas health does not.

Table 11: Logistic Regression and Job search Activity

	No Job Search by Social Assistance
	Exp(B) (Sig)
age	1.024 (0.000)
health status	1.137 (0.081)
Upper Austria	0.592 (0.001)
benefit recipient	0.292 (0.000)
gender -male	0.0919 (0.619)
status – unemployed	0.194 (0.000)
urban area	1.548 (0.010)
percentage correct total	70
in case of job search	70
in case of no job search	70
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.164
Nagelkerke R Square	0.233
Cut-Off-Point	0.61
N	827

Job search at the Job centre

Overall, 60% of the respondents have to attend regular appointments at the local job centre. Thus, more than double the share of respondents are signed in as a job seeker at the job centre compared to the conditionality of the social assistance office. In contrast to the stricter programme of the social assistance administration in Upper Austria, more respondents are registered as unemployed at the job centre in Styria. However, that difference does not indicate significance.

⁶ An interactional model with age and health allowed for a significant interaction, but not a significance of either age or health any more. In addition, further models taking into account different interactions like urban and rural area and province, activity status and gender and age and migration could not increase the overall explanation of the model that much or proved as non-significant.

Table 12: Registered as Unemployed at the Job centre (no stated: 28)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		p (chi2)
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes	280	56.9	345	62.5	625	59.9	0.066*
no	211	42.9	206	37.3	417	39.9	
don't know	1	0.2	1	0.2	2	0.2	
total	492	100.0	552	100.0	1044	100.0	

*Without the category 'don't know'

Taking into account those two groups, one can expect a great share of overlapping between the two administrations, which is the case, as 242 persons are registered as seeking work at both offices and 252 nowhere. Nevertheless, 5 per cent of the respondents registered as unemployed at the social assistance office are not at the job centre and 22 per cent vice versa. Thus, more than a quarter of the respondents are classified differently in those two regimes.

Table 13: Comparison Job Search Conditionality

Requirement of Job search at the Social Assistance Office		Registered as Unemployed at the Job centre								p (chi2)
		yes		no		don't know		total		
		count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	
yes		242	33	33	5	0	0	327	38	0.000*
no		164	22	257	35	0	0	421	57	
don't know		27	4	9	1	0	0	36	5	
total		433	59	299	41	0	0	732	100	

* without 'don't know', only respondents receiving social assistance.

In contrast to the social assistance scheme, most of the recipients experience more support for their job search at the job centre. More than 80% talk about their qualifications and abilities and out of these almost 93% experience a discussion about their chances of finding a job or training at the job centre. In addition, eight out of ten discuss the participation in projects or further training, whereas two thirds of the respondents participated in one offered by the job centre. The differences between the two provinces are only small and do not indicate a stricter regime of conditionality in one province, in sharp contrast to the harsher enforcement of job search requirements at the Upper Austrian social assistance office.

Table 14: Support at the Job centre (n.s.: 13)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total	
Did you talk about your qualifications and abilities?*(n.s.: 13)						
	count	%	count	%	count	%

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.

Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.

Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12- C.I.F. Q4618001-D

Email: espanet2011@uv.es

yes		223	81.4	287	84.9	510	83.3
no		51	18.6	51	15.1	102	16.7
don't know		-	-	-	-	-	-
total		274	100.0	338	100.0	612	100.0
If yes:	Did you talk about your chances to find a job or training (n.s.: 19)						
		count	%	count	%	count	%
	yes	199	91.7	256	93.4	455	92.7
	no	18	8.3	17	6.2	35	7.1
	don't know	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	0.2
	total	217	100.0	274	100.0	491	100.0
	Did you talk about the participation in projects/ courses or further training of the job centre? (n.s.: 15)						
		count	%	count	%	count	%
	yes	220	80.3	274	81.5	494	81.0
	no	53	19.3	61	18.2	114	18.7
	don't know	1	0.4	1	0.3	2	0.3
	total	274	100.0	336	100.0	610	100.0
If yes:	Did you participate in a project/ course or further training of the job centre (n.s.: 9)						
		count	%	count	%	count	%
	yes	180	82.2	217	81.6	397	81.9
	no	35	16.0	49	18.4	84	17.3
	don't know	4	1.8	0	0.0	4	0.8
	total	219	100.0	266	100.0	485	100.0

*No item shows any significance concerning the differences between the provinces ($p(\chi^2)=0.245, 0.337, 0.705, 0.538$, without 'don't know' and 'not stated')

4. Transformation

The legal changes and the implementation of the Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income (MGMI) have now taken almost ten years (Pfeil & Otter 2011). Still, the current process of legal transformations in the provinces is not promising too great a transformation. In most of the local job centres, recipients obtain the information that they should apply for a top-up payment when their unemployment benefit is at or below the amount of the MGMI. However, although they might hand in an application at the job centre, they will have to attend at least a first meeting at the social assistance office and, in reality, most of the job centres hand out an application but ask the claimants to hand it in in person at the social assistance office. Thus, it still requires personal contact with both administrations.

Activation is part of the social assistance system in both provinces under the previous system. Almost one third of the respondents have to search for a job at the social assistance office, which indicates a high degree of conditionality, when one takes into account that less than 3% of the population in both provinces obtains a social assistance payment. Social assistance serves as second safety net, when someone is not sufficiently insured by social insurance benefits or his/her own employment. Thus, social assistance still takes care of a distinct group of people with lower chances of employment, low employability and disability who are not covered at all by social insurance benefits, or are covered at a low level. In future, all recipients of MGMI will go through a compulsory health and employability check. Those who pass must attend courses at the job centre, those who do not pass receive either support from specific services and projects or receive a payment without further conditionality for job search.

The provincial differentiation in case of activation is in place. In Upper Austria, more people are required to search for employment via the social assistance office. The Styrian social administration does impose a lower level of conditionality reflecting the different degree of activation in the provincial legislations. In addition, urban areas with a higher level of recipients as a percentage of the population do not require job search at the social assistance office very often. Consequently, one can state that the Austrian social assistance system still constitutes *'localized, discretionary relief'* (Gough 1997) in relation to work obligations. Scrutinizing the system a little bit more, one can obtain the sense that the local social assistance offices do not support recipients but rather enforce a strict regime of pressure.

Sanctions and other obligations are more common than discussions with the caseworker about chances and access to courses and programmes.

Another aim of the new legislation is an increase in accessibility and support by the job centre. Each MGMI recipient categorized as fit for work must be registered at the job centre. This is also a current requirement - almost all social assistance recipients who were required to search for a job are registered at the job centre. Only 5 per cent have to look for work at the social assistance office, but are not registered as unemployed at the job centre. About 80 per cent of the respondents in both provinces have discussed qualifications, abilities, and participation in projects. Out of them 80 per cent participated in a project. As a result, out of 600 respondents registered as unemployed at the job centre, 400 took part in a course at the job centre. Thus, a legal change enshrines an established practice in both provinces as a right.

In summary, social assistance still provides a service based on the principle of individualised help and support. The principle of subsidiarity of help is established via strict work requirements enforcing the requirement to register as unemployed at the job centre as well as further compliance with job search obligations. The transformation towards the new legislation might put in place a less discretionary and individualised system of support. Nevertheless, the shift in policy on an operational level will be observed in the online survey of job centre administrations and social assistance administrations, the qualitative case studies of four regions in each province and the second quantitative research.

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Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.

Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.

Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12– C.I.F. Q4618001-D

Email: espanet2011@uv.es

6. Appendix

Sample Description

Table 15: Sex of Respondents (n.s.: 0)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		p (chi ²)
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
male	190	37.8	240	42.2	430	40.1	0.149
female	312	62.2	329	57.8	641	59.9	
total	502	100.0	569	100.0	1071	100.0	

Table 16: Age of the Respondents (Categories) (n.s.: 0)

Age	Upper Austria		Styria		total		cumulated	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
<=20	22	4.4	48	8.4	70	6.5	70	6.5
21 - 25	79	15.7	96	16.9	175	16.3	245	22.8
26 - 30	62	12.3	79	13.9	141	13.2	386	36.0
31 - 35	65	12.9	72	12.7	137	12.8	523	48.8
36 - 40	53	10.5	64	11.2	117	10.9	640	59.7
41 - 45	58	11.5	54	9.5	112	10.4	752	70.1
46 - 50	66	13.1	50	8.8	116	10.8	868	80.9
51 - 55	51	10.1	46	8.1	97	9.0	965	89.9
56 - 60	29	5.8	21	3.7	50	4.7	1015	94.6
older	18	3.6	39	6.9	57	5.2	1072	100
total	503	100.0	569	100.0	1072	100.0		
mean	38.4		37.2		37.8			
variance	12.6		13.8		13.3		Mann-Whitney-U	
median	38.0		35.0		36.0		p=0.027	

Table 17: Martial Status (n.s.: 2)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		p-value
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
single	235	46.9	317	55.7	552	51.6	0.062*
married, living together	85	17.0	74	13.0	159	14.9	
married, living separated	22	4.4	25	4.4	47	4.4	
widowed	8	1.6	8	1.4	16	1.5	
divorced	151	30.1	145	25.5	296	27.7	
total	501	100.0	569	100.0	1070	100.0	

*without n.s., Cramer's V

Table 18: Educational Status (n.s.: 5)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total		p-value
	count	%	count	%	count	%	
below compulsory schooling	21	4.2	23	4.1	44	4.1	0.271*
compulsory schooling	218	43.6	221	39.0	439	41.1	

Universitat de València - ERI POLIBIENESTAR.

Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.

Phone: (+34) 96.162.54.12- C.I.F. Q4618001-D

Email: espanet2011@uv.es

vocational training	150	30.0	182	32.1	332	31.1	
above compulsory schooling	46	9.2	46	8.1	92	8.6	
secondary education	37	7.4	64	11.3	101	9.5	
tertiary education	28	5.6	31	5.5	59	5.5	
total	500	100.0	567	100.0	1067	100.0	

* without n.s.,. Cramer's V

Table 19: Current Main Activity (n.s.: 2)

	Upper Austria		Styria		total	
	count	%	count	%	count	%
employed	55	10.9	73	12.9	128	12.0
unemployed	292	58.1	319	56.3	611	57.1
education	7	1.4	21	3.7	28	2.6
civil service / military service	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.1
retiree	35	7.0	30	5.3	65	6.1
unfit for work	52	10.3	40	7.1	92	8.6
childcare	37	7.4	35	6.2	72	6.7
housemaker	19	3.8	39	6.9	58	5.4
other care responsibilities	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.1
for other reasons not employed	2	0.4	10	1.8	12	1.1
other	2	0.4	0	0.0	2	0.2
total	503	100	567	100.0	1070	100,0

Research Outline

Due to the delay in implementation and low impact on the operational level, the research plan was altered and the transformation on the micro level will be covered with one ex-ante and one ex-post quantitative survey (instead of one before, one shortly after and one a year after the legal implementation). The quantitative ex-post survey is scheduled one year after the legal implementation in each province. Thus, it cannot yet be stated whether it constitutes a tighter policy coordination between the two tiers, a tighter coordination of public employment offices and social assistance offices or a single gateway for all claimants of working age in the provinces - this will be the research aim in future. It will contrast the results with the previous system on formal and operational levels, and with the aims of the reform treaty.

Table 20: Research Outline

	January - March	April – June	July – Sept.	Oct. – Dec.
2010		Preparation Quantitative Research – Social Assistance	First Quantitative Wave	First Quantitative Wave
2011	Research Report Social Assistance		Dissemination and Preparation	Online Research – Qualitative Research - Styria
2012	Online Research – Qualitative Research – Upper Austria	Second Quantitative Wave – Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income Styria	Research Report – Online and Qualitative	Second Quantitative Wave – Means Tested Guaranteed Minimum Income Upper Austria

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Edificio Institutos-Campus de Tarongers. Calle Serpis, 29. 46022. Valencia.

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Email: espanet2011@uv.es

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Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix ^a		
	Component	
	Support	Pressure
talk about professional qualifications	.904	
talk about personal chances to find a job	.894	
longer talk about job search	.878	
talk about participation in courses	.642	
participation in courses	.438	
unsolicited applications		.771
collection of company stamps		.740
presentation of job centre's appointment card		.702
reckoning with cut, deduction or revoking of benefit		.523
application for recommended job offers		.465
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
Exclusion of display of factor loads below 0.30.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		