

Long-term receipt of German UB II benefits

A qualitative analysis of long-term beneficiaries’ experiences of anti-poverty policies and their consequences for benefit dependency

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Abstract:

Against the background of striving for an integrated provision of minimum income benefits, labour market and social services for needy working-age persons in the German minimum income scheme *Unemployment Benefit II* (UB II) this paper investigates UB II long-term beneficiaries’ experiences of anti-poverty policies and their consequences for benefit dependency. National-level research showed that UB II predominantly neglects multiple needs of persons receiving benefits for 24+ months (i.e. long-term beneficiaries) due to an increasing work-first orientation, “creaming and parking” effects and a rather weak link to social services (Petzold 2013). The high share of 70 % long-term beneficiaries among all working-age UB II recipients (BA 2013) thus raises the question how UB II anti-poverty policies support or hinder long-term beneficiaries’ abilities to get out of benefit dependency. By using the theoretical concept of “trajectory” described by Riemann and Schütze (1991: 339) as a multiple-stage experience of disturbance or destruction of “existing structures of social order in biographies”, the paper argues that long-term beneficiaries experiencing such a trajectory due to benefit receipt are forced to redefine their biography in order to restore agency and improve prospects for leaving benefit dependency. Since UB II provides a certain integration mode (i.e. infinite entitlement, integration of services, personalisation) and a normative modeling (i.e. conditionality) demanding a close cooperation between beneficiary and responsible agency, anti-poverty policies play a decisive role for enabling or hindering a beneficiary to leave such a trajectory.

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On the basis of ten problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter 2012) with long-term UB II beneficiaries this paper firstly depicts biographical constellations leading to a trajectory within benefit receipt. Individual experiences of UB II anti-poverty policies are then cohesively presented as interpretive schemes that frame the subjective organisation of beneficiaries' lives. Finally, the outcome of this qualitative explorative study is identifying key aspects of UB II anti-poverty policies hindering and supporting individual abilities to overcome long-term benefit dependency. These findings will be discussed against the backdrop of the integration mode and the normative modelling of UB II.

Literature:

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