EU-CHINA SOCIAL PROTECTION REFORM PROJECT

COMPONENT 3

PUBLICITY OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE LAWS AND REGULATIONS (TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS USED FOR DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION)

VOLUME ON 2018 RESEARCH

TOPIC 3.3.3

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PUBLICITY OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE LAWS AND REGULATIONS (TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS USED FOR DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION)

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3.3.3 Publicity of Social Assistance Laws and Regulations
(Techniques and instruments used for dissemination of information)

Assessment report

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ABBREVIATIONS:
CNNIC= the China Internet Network Information Centre
SZMBCA =the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance

Disseminating information and publicising policies are some of the important aspects of social assistance. They are also an important part of the legalization of China's social assistance program. The Interim Measures on Social Assistance, which came into effect on May 1st, 2014, provide that "the People's Government at or above county level and its subordinated Department for Civil Affairs, shall conduct the publicity of the social assistance laws, regulations and policies through the media such as newspapers, broadcasting, television and the internet. In addition they shall disclose to the public information on the use and management of funds and materials for social assistance in a timely manner through public libraries, information stands and bulletin boards etc., and accept supervision by the public." In recent years the national and local authorities of civil affairs have attached great importance to information dissemination and the publicity of social assistance policies. They have issued a number of policies in this regard, which have facilitated the system being run in a good and orderly way allowing for progress to be made in this field. However, we still face some problems and challenges with regard to disseminating information and publicising policies, and the best practices for disseminating information dissemination and publicising polices need to be developed. This is the goal of this research.

1.2 Context and research questions

In recent years, with the promotion of the construction of the government under the rule of law and the enhancement of the concept of the population's legal system, especially in the process of the development of the rule of law of social assistance, the dissemination of information relating to social assistance is not only part of the basic administrative work of social assistance, but also the mechanism of realizing the goals of policy delivery, including the improvement of the management of social assistance and the operation of the social assistance system. In particular the Chinese Government in making progress in the rule of law and in public awareness of the rule of law. Awareness in these areas has been growing in China. For the legalization of social assistance, dissemination of information is more than a basic administrative task. It is also an important mechanism of guaranteeing policy dissemination, management and efficiency and the standardization of social assistance. However, the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies under China's social assistance program is still facing problems such as insufficiency of the administration and an imbalance between the requirements of the legalization and the actual reality. This directly affects the performance of social assistance. Therefore, to meet the realistic needs for disseminating information and ensuring the better operation of China' s social assistance, it is necessary to intensify the relevant work. Disseminating information should be set as one of the primary goals of China's social assistance program which is currently being updated.

Research into China's social assistance information (policy) dissemination, the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies under China's social assistance program is an important field and it had drawn some domestic Chinese scholars to conduct research from the perspectives of legal studies and public management. They have also made achievements in this field. However, this subject is still a new one, and it requires practical study and realistic understanding. Not many Chinese scholars are involved in the relevant research area and the research findings in this field are limited. Therefore, there is a large gap between the demands for, and the reality of, public administration. Thus, it is helpful to conduct some research from an academic paradigm and learn from the international experiences provided by the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP). This will allow us to conduct research on the reality of disseminating information under China's social assistance program. We can therefore provide some references to the Chinese Government on improving its work in the relevant areas. Given these objectives, our research is focused on answering several questions closely related to disseminating information on social assistance policy, including: what is the policy background of disseminating information and publicizing policies related to China's social assistance program? How are the institutional arrangements of the relevant laws? What have been the major achievements and what experiences have been gained in this field? What are the main problems? With China's goal and the EU's experience, how can we further improve the relevant work both for the present time and for the future? These become the specific questions to be answered via the research conducted under this project. They will also become an important element under the research conducted by this project.

1.3 Definition and Research methodology

1.3.1 Definition

In this paper, dissemination of information means an institutional arrangement through which the public administration or any organization empowered and entrusted by the laws and/or regulations to actively undertake dissemination of information regarding governmental activities to the public or to certain individuals or organizations is conducted through the forms or through the procedures defined by the law when exercising public power or management. In addition, the term "information dissemination" would also include publicity, and the spread of social assistance policies, which have the objective of disseminating information on social assistance to the general public and poor households so that more people can be aware of the policies. The results of the action are an increase in the rate of public awareness of the policies among the people and greater coverage of the publicity activities. In terms of the relationship between the dissemination of dissemination and the publicizing of policy, the former is policy publicity while the latter is for generating the better dissemination of information of the social assistance program.

1.3.2 Research methods

The methods adopted for this research are as follows:

Literature review and theoretical analysis. The research makes in-depth study of Chinese and foreign theories on the governance of poverty and social assistance policies, with a focus on the research on relevant theories and policies made by Chinese scholars.

Statistical analysis and the data analysis. In this report, the author makes full use of data such as that from the Statistical Yearbook of Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, to conduct statistical analysis to obtain an in-depth understanding of the issues relating to the dissemination of information.

Local study visits and academic exchanges. In 2015 and 2016 the author of this paper was invited to work as a short-term local expert under the China-EU SPRP and was commissioned to undertake the research on the calculation and the adjustment of the Dibao standard and the monitoring and evaluation of social assistance. For this research, the author has conducted local study visits to Beijing, Tianjin, Sichuan, and Liaoning to try to better understand the management and operation of the social assistance programme as well as the major problems that the system is facing.

Structural interviews and qualitative analysis. Based on academic interviews with program beneficiaries and the personnel of the social assistance program for low-income families (including families of persons with a disability, single-parent families, and impoverished children's families) conducted in 2016, this report conducted some qualitative research. Also in 2016, to gain a deeper understanding of the living conditions of the impoverished families in Beijing, the author conducted interviews with different types of poor families, including families of persons with a disability, single-parent families, and single-person families. This has helped the author to better understand the situation relating to the implementation of the Dibao policy and the extent of the poor families' awareness of social assistance policies. In addition, to obtain an understanding of the operation of the social assistance system and the implementation of its policies, the author has also conducted interviews with officials in charge of Civil Affairs at local government, street office, the staff responsible for the administration of Dibao and community workers. This has helped the author to better understand the challenges and problems faced by Dibao and how to improve the Dibao program through policy innovations and concrete measures. All these are the foundation of the present report.

For the research on disseminating information publicity and publicizing policies, I took a trip to Lioaning province to meet with the staff in the street office in Shenyang City. This was conducted with the support of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. During the visit to Shenyang city, I had some briefings and discussions with the governmental officials and staff of the street office concerning social assistance issues. Some issues concerning the publicizing of policies and the dissemination of information were discussed. Some issues discussed included what was the basic situation relating to the dissemination of information dissemination and the publicizing of the policies relating to social assistance? What are the variations among different regions and what is the difference between rural and urban areas? What are the policy documents relating to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance? What are the measures adopted to intensify the work in this field? What is the current situation of the institutions or regulations relating to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance? In recent years, what activities have been undertaken relating to the dissemination of information dissemination and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance? And what are the results of these activities? What are the challenges or obstacles for better work in these areas in the future? What could be the innovations in this field in the age of the internet? What are the measures that could be adopted to improve the population's awareness of social assistance policies? In order to improving the staff of civil affairs understanding of the policies what activities have been conducted by way of training them to improve their work on the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance? In addition, the author of this report has also participated in academic conferences and policy discussions on social assistance. These also constitute a part of the resources for the present research. These have become the important research foundation of this project.

2. SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND PUBLICISING POLICIES IN CHINA

2.1 Publicizing information publicity and the rule of law of the Chinese Government

The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies are important activities and objective requirements for promoting the rule of law of the Chinese Government. The development by the Government of the concept of rule by law is an important part of strengthening the Government's own development and the promotion of the modernization of the country's governance system and governance capability. Transparency of public administration is a requirement proposed under the rule of law by the government. It is necessary to improve the transparency of the Government administration under the rule of law. In 2016, the General Office of the State Council and the CPC Central Committee issued the “Opinions on Promoting the information dissemination of Administrative Affairs in an all-round way.” These opinions require the public administration to make further progress on transparency in five areas: decision-making, policy implementation, public management, public service, and performance (collectively known as “the dissemination of information relating to the five aspects”). Therefore, the public administration must strengthen its efforts on providing policy interpretation to the population, making a response to social concerns and constructing platform for the dissemination of information. This document represents the guideline for the dissemination of information by China’s public administration. As an important part of public administration, social assistance can directly affect governance, harmony, and the stability of society. It is especially relevant to the vital interests of the public, especially poor families. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the efforts at providing the interpretation of social assistance policies to the population and at improving the dissemination of information about the policies to the population. This is helpful for realizing good operation and justice of the social assistance system. It is also necessary for achieving the goals of social assistance programs and protecting the rights and the interests of the population. Thereby, humanistic solicitude can be spread over society. In the report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it is clearly stated that the party shall make efforts on 1) “coordinating the urban and rural social assistance systems, and improving the Dibao system”; 2) “improving the systems of social assistance, social welfare, charitable causes, veterans’ benefits, and improving the social care system for rural orphaned children women and the elderly”; 3) “promoting the rule of law in China"; and 4) “consolidating grass-roots’ political structure, improving democracy at the grass-roots’ level, and protecting the right of the population to get access to information, to participate in the governance process, to express ideas and to exercise supervision over public administration.”[1]These are the guidelines for China's social assistance system in a new era. As part of the implementation of these guidelines, improving the dissemination of information about social assistance is very important. The dissemination of information is also an important institutional arrangement and guarantee mechanism for realizing the goals of the social assistance program. In practice, the dissemination of information about social assistance is leading to new and higher requirements for the work under social assistance. This would therefore greatly promote the standardization and normalization of public administration. Essentially, the public administration is required to conduct a good work program to dissemination information and to dissemination and publicise the policies for realizing the goals of the social assistance program.

2.2 The dissemination of information and the legalization of social assistance

The intensification of the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies is essential in ensuring the transformation and development China's social assistance system. It, is a practical need. Since its establishment, China’s new social assistance system has played an important role in guaranteeing the basic livelihood for poor people in both the urban and the rural areas, in maintaining social harmony and stability and in promoting social fairness and justice. It has become an important component of China’s social security and social

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[1] http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm

protection systems. In particular, the Chinese Government and the public have high expectations of this system. It has undergone profound institutional change. Objectively, it requires the public administration to strengthen and promote the work of disseminating information in order that the social assistance can move forward. The reasons for this are as follows:

Firstly, for the development of China's social assistance program, the strengthening of the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies is necessary for dealing with the issue of program non-participation.

The establishment of a fair and sustainable system is the fundamental goal of the reform and the development of China's social assistance program. To achieve this the rule of law (legalization) must be set as the fundamental principle and the Government must make continual efforts to improve the social assistance system itself. In particular, it should promote the operational mechanisms of social assistance; the quality of social assistance services, the Dibao program’s capacity to support the minimum livelihood of the people, and to supervise and to inspect the implementation of these programs. In these processes, the management and the dissemination of information regarding social assistance play important roles. In local government practices, the development of an information system has been clearly proposed as a goal of the social assistance program. This has become the key orientation for the reform and the development of the social assistance program. For example, in the “Anhui Province’s 13th Five-Year Plan for Developing the Social Assistance System”, the Provincial Government has identified the full development of an information system as one of the goals of the social assistance system. It is clearly stated that "the provincial authorities must explore the ways to build up a database of basic information covering all types of people in urban and rural areas; and the interconnection of information relevant to employment, social security, medical care, education, housing, poverty alleviation and charity must be promoted. An information sharing mechanism for both vertical and horizontal interconnected social assistance information should be established.” [2] In recent years, Sunshine Dibao (transparent Dibao other than black-box operation)” has been a common goal of the social assistance programs in many regions. It means that the whole process of the Dibao program (its management and its operation) must be put under the supervision of the public to the greatest possible extent, and the competent authorities must strive to avoid “the false protection” and “the wrong protection” of social assistance benefits and avoid “entitling benefits to officials’ family and social relatives (known as relative entitlement)”. In this regard, the disclosure of information about Dibao beneficiaries is widely implemented as a policy to solve these problems. This shows that the dissemination of information has become an important part of these policies and an important constituent part of the practice of social assistance.

In addition, the publicizing of social assistance policies is also a requirement for the goal of developing the social assistance system. Insisting on social equity is the fundamental principle of social assistance. At the same time, in the implementation of social assistance policies, the realization of the policy that "the deserved one should be covered by social assistance" is basically followed by the work done in implementing social assistance. All of these have brought forward the requirements for public education about the social assistance system. In the course of the development of the Chinese social assistance system, in the mid-1990s, with the change to a market-oriented reform and the condition of the labor market, new groups of poor people emerged in the cities, for example, laid-off workers and unemployed people However, due to the restrictions on the financial capacity of making social assistance payments and the imperfect social assistance policy system, some poor people were not included in the social assistance system. In recent years, social assistance, as a citizen's right and a Government responsibility, has been further strengthened and the guarantee function in the social assistance policy has become an important institutional orientation of Chinese social policy. However, for some reasons, such as the public's lack of understanding of the social assistance policy and the concern about the stigma of social assistance there is a lack of access to the information about the relevant policies (e.g. some poor families in the rural areas have difficulty in obtaining information from the Internet). Although some people need social assistance, they have been forced to give up the opportunity and the right to apply for social assistance because of their limited access to information, and as a consequence, they have not received their social assistance benefit. In addition, under the current policy of public education about social assistance, some publicity about the policy has also had a negative impact on potential social assistance applicants who want to obtain social assistance. Therefore, in the public education policy relating to social assistance, the goal of the policy relating to social assistance publicity should be to allow everyone in difficulty to get assistance or at least to get the information needed, so as to expand the awareness of the social assistance policy.

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[2] http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/yw/shjz/dfzc/201703/20170300003860.shtml

Second, the dissemination of social assistance information and the publication of policies are a requirement for the enhancement of the population’s concept of the rule of law.

In the course of the development of the rule of law, the population’s concept and consciousness of the rule of law have been constantly improved. This has led to higher requirements for evidenced-based and standardized management of social assistance leading to the population have increasing needs for the dissemination of information on social assistance. Social assistance policies are among the key elements of social security policies, and they are directly relevant to the governance of poverty and the security of livelihoods. They are, of course, directly related to the vital interests of the population, especially the poor, and this is particularly true when it comes to the procedures for applying for social assistance benefits and the standards for the benefits. In recent years, especially with the rapid development of social assistance in China, the Central and Local Governments have issued many policies regarding social assistance and social security. These have aroused widespread interest among the public. This has required the authorities to develop social assistance along with its legalization. The authorities must adhere to the rule of law, and thereby make further improvement in the publicizing and the dissemination of policies relating to social assistance. In the course of these processes, the competent authorities must become better at interpreting the policies issued by the Government and therefore localize the policies. By doing this, they can make their performance as good as they possibly can and the fairness and the sustainability of the social assistance system can be ensured. Therefor the rights of the population and especially those of the poor households can be well protected.

2.3 Information dissemination and the operation of social assistance

The sound operation of the social assistance system is dependent upon the strengthening of the dissemination of information and the publicising of social assistance policies. Since its establishment, China’s new social assistance system has been always working to perfect its policy system. In recent years, along with the legalization of social assistance and the increasing importance of social assistance in China’s political context, the Central and the Local Governments have issued many policies and regulations concerning social assistance. These play important roles in the orderly administration of the social assistance system. This is a period during which social assistance policies are issued intensively, and policy adjustments take place according to practical needs. If we take Beijing as an example, from 1996 to 2006, a decade after the establishment of the Dibao system, the municipality had progressively raised the standard of Dibao benefits on nine occasions. However, due to the unbalanced development of the economy and of society in China, there are also large regional differences in the formulation and the implementation of social assistance policies and in the specific provisions for social assistance services, which can be seen via the standards and the eligibility settings of the social assistance benefits in different regions. It is, therefore, necessary to improve the dissemination of information and the interpretation and publicity of social assistance policies in order that the population is able to have a better understanding of social assistance. This helps to improve the operational efficiency, institutional justice and procedural justice of the social assistance program. For example, according to the Beijing Municipality's Measures for the Application and Approval of Dibao Benefits for Urban and Rural Residents (Trial), an urban or rural resident with a Beijing Hukou is eligible to receive the corresponding Dibao benefits, when his or her co-living family members' per capita income is lower than the Dibao threshold and, at the same time, his or her family economic situation meets the requirement of the Beijing Municipality's Guideline on Verifying Family Economic Situation for Applying for Social Assistance (Trial). [3] On the other hand, according to the "Sichuan Provincial Measures on Dibao Benefits for Rural Residents", any rural household with a Sichuan Hukou can apply for a rural Dibao benefit when the per capita net income of their members is lower than the Dibao threshold. [4] At the same time, additional provisions are clearly stipulated. That is: a rural resident is not eligible to the benefit when he or she is of employable age (set by the law) and has no appropriate reason for refusing employment. In terms of the Dibao benefit standards, some regions have achieved the integration of the urban and the rural programs and standards, whilst in other regions the discrepancy between the urban and the rural benefits is still large.

Table 1：Dibao Standard for Urban and Rural Residents by Provinces - First Quarter of 2018

	Urban Dibao Standard (Yuan per month)	Rural Dibao Standard (Yuan per month)	Difference (Yuan)
Beijing	1000.00	1000.0	0.0
Tianjin	860	860.0	0.0
Hebei	589.7	349.3	240.4
Shanxi	474.3	310.6	163.7
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	612.9	427.8	185.1
Liaoning	566.3	362.8	203.5
Jilin	483.4	311.6	171.8
Heilongjiang	551.5	321.6	229.9

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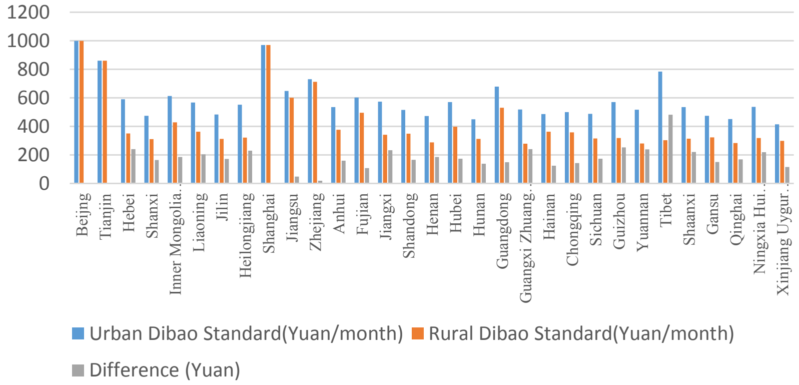
[3] http://www.bdpf.org.cn/zwxx/zcfg/shbz/c34556/content.html
[4] http://www.scmz.gov.cn/Article/Detail?id=8468

Shanghai	970	970.0	0.0
Jiangsu	647.6	599.9	47.7
Zhejiang	730.3	712.0	18.3
Anhui	535.3	375.7	159.6
Fujian	602.1	495.2	106.9
Jiangxi	572.8	340.1	232.7
Shandong	514.7	349.1	165.6
Henan	472.9	288.0	184.9
Hubei	570	397.8	172.2
Hunan	449.4	311.8	137.6
Guangdong	679.1	530.7	148.4
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	518	278.4	239.6
Hainan	485.8	361.7	124.1
Chongqing	500	357.3	142.7
Sichuan	487.1	314.9	172.2
Guizhou	569.5	317.9	251.6
Yunnan	516.7	279.0	237.7
Tibet	783.3	302.3	481.0
Shaanxi	534.2	314.0	220.2
Gansu	473	322.4	150.6
Qinghai	450.6	282.8	167.8
the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	536.8	317.9	218.9
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region	414.1	298.7	115.4

Source: The author's calculations and collations according to the website data of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjjb/bzbz/2018/201806041619.html

Figure 1：Dibao Standard for urban and rural residents by provinces in the first quarter of 2018



Source: bar chart produced by the author based on the date from http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjjb/bzbz/2018/201806041619.html

In addition, for the social assistance target groups, it is helpful that they fully understand the policies issued by the Central and Local Governments, especially their rights and their obligations to receive a benefit. It would be good if they have an understanding, recognition, and support from the target groups when the public authorities implement social assistance policies. In that case implementation would be easier. For instance, according to the "Regulations on Dibao Benefit Standards for Urban Residents", "urban residents who are at working age and able to work but have not yet been employed shall participate in public-interest community services organized by their residents' committees during the period when they enjoy the urban Dibao benefit." In this case, publicizing of social assistance policies shall be functional in facilitating the government and the urban citizens having a good interaction.

It would also be helpful in managing both the implementation of social assistance from the side of the public authority and the behaviour of social assistance recipients.

2.3.1 Information dissemination and the structural change of social assistance

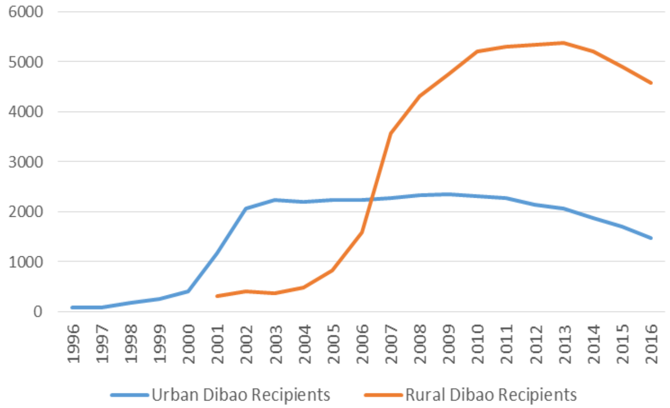
The changes in the structural characteristics of social assistance groups requires that the dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policies need to be strengthened. The dissemination of information dissemination and the publicizing of social assistance policies represent a response to the structural changes of social assistance target groups**.** Since its establishment, China's new social assistance system has increased a lot in terms of the scale of benefits and the expansion of the target groups from the overall historical dimension. Over the years, the structure of the target groups has also undergone a profound transformation.

Table 2: Number of Urban and Rural Dibao Recipients since 1996, 10,000 persons

Year	Number of Urban Dibao Recipients	Number of Rural Dibao Recipients
1996	84.9	-
1997	87.9	-
1998	184.1	-
1999	256.9	-
2000	402.6	-
2001	1170.7	304.6
2002	2064.7	407.8
2003	2246.8	367.1
2004	2205	488
2005	2234.2	825
2006	2240.1	1593.1
2007	2272.1	3566.3
2008	2334.8	4305.5
2009	2345.6	4760.0
2010	2310.5	5214.0
2011	2276.8	5305.7
2012	2143.5	5344.5
2013	2064.2	5388.0
2014	1877.0	5207.2
2015	1701.1	4903.6
2016	1480.2	4586.5

Source: China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook (2017), pp. 154-155.

Figure 2：Number of Urban and Rural Dibao Recipients since 1996



Source: line graph prepared by the author based on data from the China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook (2017).

Diversity in the structure of target groups of China's social assistance is prominent. The target groups include the elderly, children, persons with a disability, poor rural residents and poor urban residents. Despite educational improvements over the years, a Dibao beneficiary is still characterized by low level of educational attainments. This creates obstacles and difficulties for the beneficiaries when they try to understand the social assistance policies. It also presents implementational difficulties for the public authority. According to the statistical data, from 2006 to 2011, the total level of education of employed members of Dibao households has been enhanced. This can be seen from data on the increase in proportion of Dibao beneficiaries who have received a professional higher education. However, the dominant proportion of recipients (75.7%) have received only a primary or a secondary education.

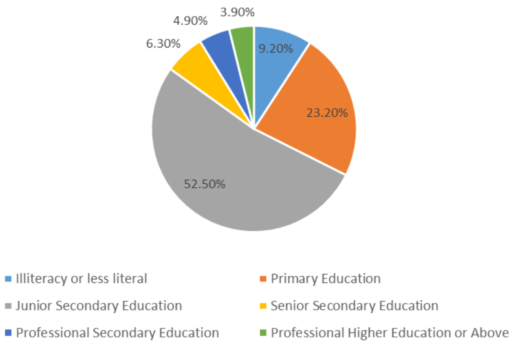
Table 3：Educational levels of the employed personnel in rural Dibao families

Education	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Illiterate or less literate	15.4%	12.1%	13.0%	11.9%	12.3%	9.2%
Primary Education	22.4%	22.0%	24.1%	24.6%	21.9%	23.2%
Junior Secondary Education	51.7%	47.7%	49.8%	47.8%	49.0%	52.5%
Senior Secondary Education	7.5%	7.5%	7.1%	6.3%	7.2%	6.3%

Professional Secondary Education	2.5%	7.0%	5.0%	7.5%	6.5%	4.9%
Professional Higher Education or Above	0.5%	3.7%	1.0%	1.9%	3.1%	3.9%

Source: Beijing Survey Team, National Bureau of Statistics, and Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics: 2011 Statistics on Beijing's Urban and Rural Resident Livelihoods

Figure 3：Educational level of the employed personnel in rural Dibao families



Source: Pie chart developed by the author based on the data contained in the 2011 Statistics on Beijing's Urban and Rural Resident Livelihoods

When making a comparison of the education attainments between urban Dibao households and rural Dibao households, we can see that, even though the educational levels of urban Dibao households is higher than that of rural Dibao households, those who have only received a junior or senior secondary education still dominate. Thus, when it comes to understanding the policies, they have problems.

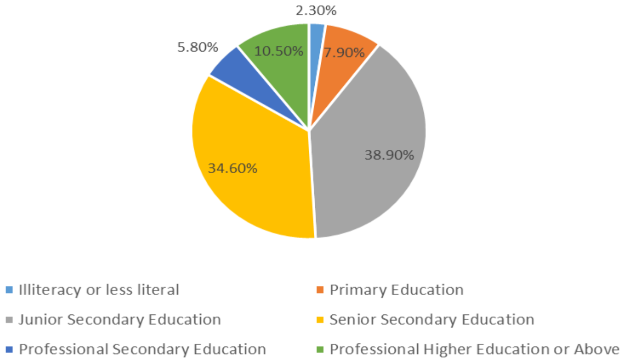
Table 4：Educational level of the employed personnel in urban Dibao families

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Illiterate or less literate	5.6%	3.2%	3.3%	2.7%	2.1%%	2.3%
Primary Education	15.1%	16.1%	14.6%	15.4%	15.2%	7.9%
Junior Secondary Education	38.3%	36.6%	38.7%	38.9%	38.9%	38.9%
Senior Secondary	32.3%	31.6%	30.7%	30.2%	30.0%	34.6%

Education						
Professional Secondary Education	3.3%	4.6%	4.8%	5.2%	5.2%	5.8%
Professional Higher Education or Above	5.4%	7.9%	7.9%	7.6%	8.6%	10.5%

Source: Beijing Survey Team, National Bureau of Statistics, and Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics: Statistics on Beijing's Urban and Rural Resident Livelihood in 2011

Figure 4：Educational level of the employed personnel in urban Dibao families



Source: Pie chart prepared by the author based on the data from the Statistics on Beijing's Urban and Rural Resident Livelihood in 2011

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the interpretation and the publicity of social assistance policy during the implementation of the social assistance program. In this way, the target groups of social assistance and the public can better understand the policies. This will make it even easier for the public authority to conduct their work so as to promote the sound development of the social assistance program.

2.3.2 Information dissemination and the significant increase of social assistance funds

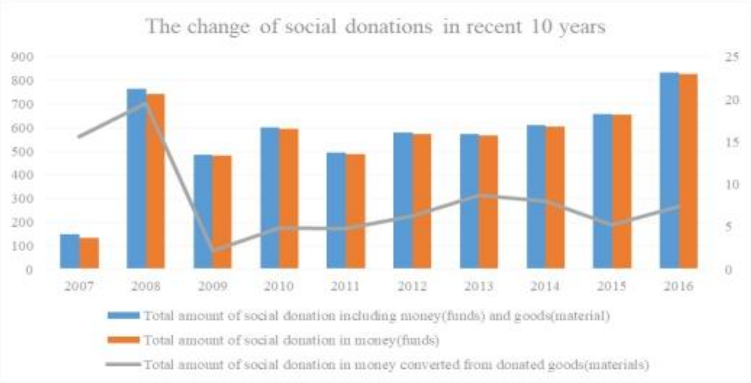
The significant increase in social assistance funds requires that dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policy be strengthened. The significant growth in social assistance funds requires an improvement in the dissemination of information and in the publicizing of the policy relating to social assistance. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the governance of poverty and the development of social assistance. Following the expansion of the social assistance programs, the expenditure on social assistance has grown rapidly. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the dissemination of information on the funds and their performance in order to improve the effectiveness of public finances. Taking philanthropy as an example, from 2007 to 2016, the total amount of donations made by social forces in China had increased from RMB 14.83 billion to 83.44 billion, an increase of 463%. Therefore, strengthening the dissemination of information about social assistance, including charitable donations, is not only a response to the public's concern about the implementation of the social assistance program, but also a guarantee mechanism to ensure transparent and standardized funds' management.

Table 5：Changes in social donations over the recent 10 years Unit: RMB 100 million

Year	Total amount of social donations including money (funds) and goods (material)	Total amount of social donations in money (funds)	Total amount of social donation in money converted from donated goods (materials)
2007	148.3	132.8	15.6
2008	764.1	744.5	19.6
2009	485.9	483.7	2.2
2010	601.7	596.8	4.9
2011	494.9	490.1	4.8
2012	578.8	572.5	6.3
2013	575.1	566.4	8.7
2014	612.4	604.4	8.0
2015	659.7	654.5	5.2
2016	834.4	827.0	7.4

Source: Statistical Yearbook of China Civil Affairs (2017)

Figure 5：Changes in social donations over the recent 10 years



Source: Graph made by the author based on the data in the Statistical Yearbook of China Civil Affairs (2017)

2.4 Information dissemination and the rapid development of the Internet

The rapid development of the Internet and the mobile Internet has provided the necessary social conditions for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policy in regard to social assistance in China. Over the recent years, the Internet and the mobile Internet have developed rapidly in China, with a larger and larger population able to be covered by it. The development of the mobile Internet is rapid and continuous, and it is reshaping the channels and the ecology for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policy in China. Therefore, it is having a profound influence on the dissemination of dissemination and the publicizing of social assistance policy. The role of Internet in this field is becoming more and more important. It has become the major channel for the dissemination of information. It represents a new topic and new phenomenon originating from the development of social assistance in contemporary China. “Internet + social assistance” is becoming a new ecology and a new orientation for China’s social assistance program and it is the future of the management of social assistance. With the rapid development of the Internet, the foundation has been laid for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policy. According to the 41st Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released in Beijing by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) in December 2017, the number of Internet users in China had reached 772 million, and the rate of penetration had reached 55.8%. The number of mobile Internet users in China had reached 735 million and the proportion of Internet users using mobile phones to access the Internet had increased from 95.1% in 2016 to 97.5%. In addition, the number of rural Internet users in China had reached 209 million.[5]

Table 6：Development of Internet and Mobile Internet in China in 2007-2017

Year	Internet Users （10,000）	Percentage of Internet Users	Mobile Internet Users （10,000）	Percentage of Mobile Internet Users
2007	21000	16.0%	5040	24.0%
2008	29800	22.6%	11760	39.5%
2009	38400	28.9%	23344	60.8%
2010	45730	34.3%	30274	66.2%
2011	51310	38.3%	35558	69.3%
2012	56400	42.1%	41997	74.5%

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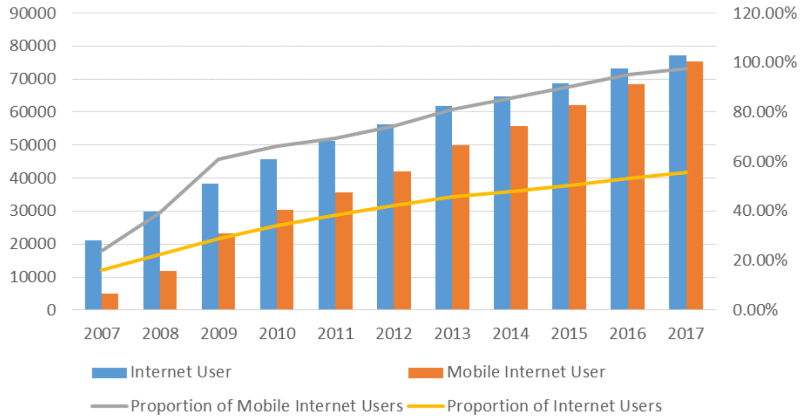
[5] http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201801/t20180131_70190.htm

2013	61758	45.8%	50006	81.0%
2014	64875	47.9%	55678	85.8%
2015	68826	50.3%	61981	90.1%
2016	73125	53.2%	68531	95.1%
2017	77198	55.8%	75265	97.5%

Source: Calculation by the author based on the data from the 41st Statistical Report on China's Internet Development

Figure 6：Development of Internet and Mobile Internet Users in China in 2007-2017



Source: Graph prepared by the author based on the data from the 41st Statistical Report on China's Internet Development

2.5 Information dissemination and the participation of social forces

The participation of social organizations in social assistance has formed a multichannel for the dissemination of information and the publicising of social assistance policy. As part of the legalization of China' social assistance, the Civil Affairs authorities play the role of being the main channel for information on social assistance and the main player in delivering social assistance. At the same time, the trade unions, the women's federations, the disabled persons' federations, the Communist Youth League and other groups have also actively participated in developing social assistance and represent important forces in this field. Charitable organizations have made progress in the legalization of China' social assistance program. The spirit of volunteering has grown in the heart of Chinese citizens, and the population are becoming more acquainted with charitable issues. Many charitable organizations and non-profit organizations have emerged. According to the Statistical Communique on Social Services Development in 2016, at the end of 2016, there were 5,559 foundations of various types in China, of which: 1,730 were public foundations, 3,791 were non-public foundations, and 245 were foundations registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (9 of these were foreign-related foundations and 29 were representatives of institutions of overseas foundations). [6]These have also become a part of social assistance and show the involvement of social forces in this field.

Table 7：Increase in the number of social organizations and foundations in China from 2003 to 2016

Year	Number of social organizations	Number of foundations
2003	266612	954
2004	289432	892
2005	319762	975
2006	354393	1144
2007	386916	1340
2008	413660	1597
2009	431069	1843
2010	445631	2200
2011	461971	2614
2012	499268	3029
2013	547245	3549
2014	606048	4117
2015	662425	4784
2016	702405	5559

Source：China Civil Affairs' Statistical Yearbook, 2017.

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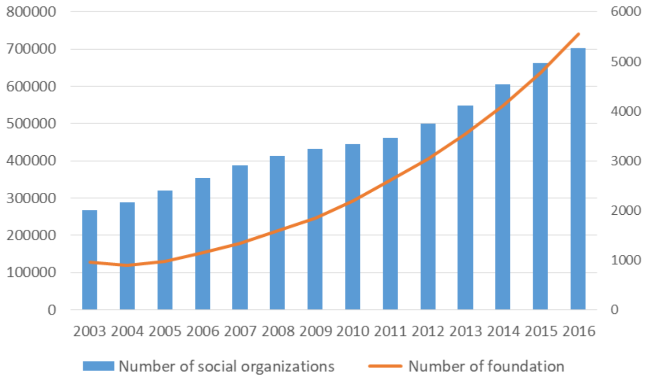
[6] "Social service development statistics bulletin 2016" downloaded from http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjgb/201708/20170800005382.shtml

Figure 7: The increase in the social organizations and foundations in China in 2003-2016



Source: Graph made by the author based on data from the China Civil Affairs' Statistical Yearbook, 2017.

3. CHINA'S PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

With the development of social assistance in China, the publicizing of social assistance policy is becoming an important part of the operation of the social assistance system. In the practical implementation of social assistance in China, the pattern of dissemination of information about social assistance is formed through the combination of the traditional and the modern, online and offline and within the system and outside of the system.

3.1 A multilevel system of disseminating information about social assistance

A top-down multilevel policy and legal system for the dissemination of information and the publicising of social assistance policy has been formed during the development of the social assistance program. In the legalization of the Chinese social assistance, a multilevel (national, provincial, municipal and county-level) policy and legal system for the dissemination of information and policy advocacy has been gradually developing. This has laid down an administrative basis for the dissemination of information about social assistance. In order to ensure the legal rights of citizens, of legal persons and of other organizations to obtain government information, to improve the transparency of government activities, to promote administration under the rule of law, and to give full import to the role of government information in the socioeconomic activities of the people, the Regulation on Disclosure of Governmental Information of the People's Republic of China (The Regulation) came into effect in May 2008. It functions as the basic principle for the dissemination of government information. It is of course also a guideline for the disclosure and the publicizing of social assistance information and policies and plays a fundamental role in this field. The "Regulations" has clearly defined the issues on which information should be disclosed, and the requirements relating to the dissemination of dissemination. The issues include poverty alleviation, education, health care, social security, employment promotion, and policies, measures, and implementation of these issues are included in the dissemination of dissemination. The Regulation states that, among the most important information to be disclosed, there must also be information on “public-interest issues” and the “management, utilization, and distribution of funds and materials for disaster relief, veterans’ benefits, social assistance and from donations”. For this, the Regulation stipulates that “the public administration shall openly disclose government information through government bulletins, websites, press conferences, newspapers, radio and television, etc. which are easy for the public to access to”. It requires that “before March 31 of every year, local governments at all levels must publicize an annual report on the government’s work.” [7] The Regulation has been in effect for 10 years, during which the objective requirements on the dissemination of information, the environment for the rule of law, and the environment for public administration have seen great changes. Therefore, there is a need to revise the Regulation in order to better guide and regulate the activities relating to the dissemination of information. This also puts new demands on the dissemination of information and publicizing of policies in the field of social assistance. Following the progress relating to legalization in China, the disclosure of Government information is becoming more and more prominent. It represents an important approach and guarantee mechanism for the development of service-oriented, responsible, and incorruptible governments under the rule. In 2011, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinion on Deepening of Information on Public Administration and Strengthening the Service of Public Administration[8]. This requires the public administration to “strengthen the digitization, and to promote the application, of modern technology such as telecommunications networks, broadcasting and television networks, and the Internet in government services in order to improve the level of digitization of government services”. This imposes a higher requirement on the dissemination of information by public administrations. In 2016, the General Office of the State Council issued the Notice on Implementation Approaches for “the Opinion on Promoting Information Dissemination for Public Administration in An All-round Way”. It requires that public administrations make further progress on the dissemination of information in five areas: decision-making, policy implementation, public management, public service and performance (Generally referred to as “information dissemination of the five aspects”). Therefore, the public administration must strengthen its efforts at providing policy interpretation to the population, providing responses to social concerns, and constructing platforms for the dissemination of information. Through these approaches, the public administration can further streamline its administration and delegate its power to the lower levels, strengthen regulation and optimize public services. [9]

In response to the reality that the number of foundations has grown rapidly in China, and in order to regulate these foundations, the “Regulation on the Management of Foundations” stipulates that “in conducting public welfare activities in accordance with their articles of association, foundations must follow the principles of openness and transparency”, and “after the annual inspection by the Registration and Management Authority, foundations and representative of foreign foundations shall publish their annual reports in the media designated by the Authority, and accept the public’s inquiries and supervision.” In addition, “donors have the right to inquire of the foundations about their use and management of donated property, and put forward opinions and suggestions. The foundation should reply in a timely and truthful manner" to all enquiries from donors.[10]

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[7] http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2007-04/24/content_2602477.htm
[8] http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2011/content_1927031.htm
[9] http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-11/15/content_5132852.htm

To further standardize behavior under the social assistance system, strengthen social assistance's management and to improve the efficiency of the use of fiscal funds, the State Ministry of Finance and the State Ministry of Civil Affairs began implementing the Measures for the Administration of Dibao Funds in the urban and rural areas in September 2012. As clearly stated in the Measures, the principle of managing the urban and the rural Dibao funds is that information on their management must be transparent and open to the public. The Measure requires the competent authorities "to strengthen the disclosure of information on the management of the Dibao funds, for which information on relevant policies and data shall be disclosed in legal way, and institutionalize the publication of information on the approval of a Dibao beneficiary. The delivery of a Dibao benefit must be implemented in a strict way." [11]

The Charity Law of the People's Republic of China came into effect on September 1, 2016. It is an important symbol of the achievement of the legalization of social assistance in China. Yet it is a legal response to the development of charitable causes in China. In the law, "information dissemination" is a separate chapter. In it clear provisions are made on the elements of the dissemination of information, including the institutionalization of the dissemination of information and the content covered by this information dissemination. For example, "charitable organizations should disclose their annual work reports and financial accounting reports to the public every year", "the disclosed information must be true, complete, and timely" and "charitable organizations that carry out targeted fund-raising shall inform their donors in a timely manner of the status of the fund-raising and the management and the utilization of the funds that they have raised." [12] In this way, the behavior of charities can be regulated in a clear manner, and the development of philanthropy in China can be legalized. In this regard, the law has really played an important role.

The "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of State Secrets" came into effect on October 1, 2010. It is aimed at preserving state secrets and safeguarding national security and national interests. It defines the scope and confidentiality of state secrets, the procedures, supervision and management of confidentiality, and the corresponding legal responsibilities with a clear statement. It represents an important legal basis for the dissemination of information.

During the development of the rule of law in China's social assistance program, the policy relating to the publicity of social assistance measures has been further strengthened. The Interim Measures for Social Assistance (Article 62) clearly stipulates that "The People's Government above the county level and the social assistance administration departments thereunder shall publicize the laws, the regulations and the social assistance policies through the press, broadcasting, television, Internet and other media."

Following the legalization of social assistance and the promotion of the relevant national policies and regulations, the dissemination of information concerning the social assistance program has been carried out in most regions. A relatively complete and comprehensive disclosure system of government information has been established, and the administrative regulations and managerial procedures for the disclosure of government information and publication of social assistance have been developed. These have facilitated the dissemination of information on social assistance. For example, in recent years, the government of Suzhou, Jiangsu province has been focusing on 1) ensuring the truthfulness, timeliness, effectiveness and security of the dissemination of information; 2) improving work methods of public administrations; 3) improving their administrative efficiency, and 4) promoting a complete and standardized program to disseminate the Government's information. These steps are all aimed at promoting the decision-making process of public administration to be scientific and democratic; and at protecting the population's right to know about the reform and the development of social assistance policy. Thus, it helps to promote a good image of social assistance in the eyes of the public and create a good environment for the development of social assistance. Therefore, the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs (SZMBCA) has formulated regulations like the "Procedures of Release and Checking of Administrative Information of SZMBCA" and the "Regulation on the Dissemination of Information and the Review of Confidentiality at SZMBCA", the "Regulation on the Active Dissemination of Information by SZMBCA", the "Regulation on Public Hearing of Information of SZMBCA", the "Regulation on Press Conferences at SZMBCA ", the "Regulation on Accountability of the Dissemination of Information at SZMBCA" and the "Regulation on the Assessment of the done on the Dissemination of Information dissemination at SZMBCA". All these have formed the basic foundation for the dissemination of information about social assistance in Suzhou.

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[10] http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1026/2397686.html
[11] http://www.mof.gov.cn/pub/ningbo/lanmudaohang/zhengcefagui/201507/t20150722_1339877.html
[12] http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2016-03/19/content_5055467.htm

The development of the policies, laws and regulations on the dissemination of information about social assistance in China shows us that despite its short history, the dissemination of information about social assistance has been accorded great importance by Governments at every level. The legal system for the dissemination of information is being improved, and the rule of law in China is being further promoted. All these constitute progress in the legalization of the dissemination of information and the publication of policies relating to the social assistance program. The relevant laws and regulations function as part of the whole legal system relating to social assistance. Yet they are also the essential components of the policy system in this field. They provide a good legal foundation and guarantee mechanism for the sound implementation and standardized operation of China's social assistance program. They will go on playing a vital role in this field.

3.2 Multichannel and diversified information dissemination patterns

Multiple channels and diversified channels have been developed for the disclosure, the release and the dissemination of social assistance information. As is the case with the administrative system, the Chinese social assistance program is managed by multiple authorities. Therefore, when it comes to the dissemination of information about the social assistance program, the management of the program is also scattered among diverse authorities. Accordingly, there is a lack of relatively unified mechanism for the management of the dissemination of information about the social assistance program. Since its establishment, China's new social assistance system has gradually developed a diversified management pattern in which the authority of civil affairs departments leading the way. At the same time there is involvement by other relevant authorities and the participation of social forces is also present in the reform and the development of social assistance programs. Such structure is established according to the "Interim Measures for Social Assistance". "**The civil affairs sections under the State Council is responsible for coordination of the construction of the social assistance system nationwide.** State Council's Departments of Civil Affairs, Health and

Family Planning, Education, Housing and Urban-rural Development, and Human Resources and Social Security are responsible for their corresponding social assistance programs and managing them in accordance with their respective obligations. Similarly, within local People's Governments at or above the county level, the departments of health, family planning, education, housing and urban-rural development, and human resources and social security are responsible for their corresponding social assistance programs and the management of the work within their respective administrative areas in accordance with their respective obligations. Due to the current diversification of the managerial authorities and the administrative agencies which are responsible for the different social assistance programs, the dissemination of information and the management of social assistance programs is characterized by diversification. Among the authorities, those of civil affairs play the major role in the coordination of social assistance programs, and therefore play the major role in the disclosure of information and the publicizing of social assistance policy. Civil Affairs is responsible for the disclosure of information concerning natural disasters, the national standard on the urban and the rural Dibao benefit, the benefits for the extremely poor, temporary assistance, medical assistance, public-interest lottery funds for welfare and charities whilst the Education Authority is responsible for disclosing information on the policies and the programs for reducing poverty in education. The, Authority of Housing and Urban-rural Development is responsible for the disclosure of information on low rental housing etc. Social forces also participate in the development of social assistance. Organizations like the trade unions, the Communist Youth League and the Women's Federations and other social organizations also undertake work relating to the dissemination of information concerning social assistance and poverty alleviation. In this way a framework is formed, by which the dissemination of information and the management of social assistance programs are conducted by different functional departments of the Government and by non-governmental organizations. For example, on the official website of the Federation of Trade Unions in Ma'anshan City, the federation publicized information on the help and assistance available to distressed workers during August-September in 2017;[13] In Changsha city, Hunan province, the Municipal Women's Federation publicized information on the assistance being given to poor women suffering from mammary cancer and cervical carcinoma on their the website called "Women of Changsha"[14]. In 2016, the Municipal Committee of CPC in Hefei City, Anhui Province, launched a program to help poor students in college, and the committee publicized the beneficiaries on the We-chat public account of the Hefei Communist Youth League as well as in the Hefei Daily15.

3.3 Local governments and the dissemination of information on social assistance

In this regard, the dissemination of information concerning activities in the sphere of social assistance are carried out in various forms, and the publicising of social assistance policies has become an important way and working method for disseminating information on social assistance programs. In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, with the objective of increasing the efforts to publicize social assistance policies, to improve the transparency of social assistance activities, to receive supervision by the public, to promote the implementation of the policies, and to facilitate the civil affairs' staff's and the population's understanding of the policies, the Department of Civil Affairs in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region issued the Notice of the Department of Civil Affairs of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on Strengthening the Publicising of Social Assistance Policies on August 30, 2012. The Notice provides clear explanations as to the significance of policy of publicity. It has also defined the contents of the publicity, the ways to promote the publicity, and specific requirements on the work of publicizing the policy relating to social assistance. It requires the relevant agencies to undertake publicity concerning the policies related to social assistance and the work of social assistance authorities. The approaches include brochures on the policy, leaflets, the production of news reports, subtitles of public-interest advertisements, special lectures, feature films and televised speeches etc. "The agencies must attach importance to online publicity and strengthen the management and maintenance of the official websites of Governments at all levels and of the civil affairs' authorities including updating the website's content in a timely manner, promulgating the relevant policies and regulations on social assistance on local sites, and disseminating the relevant information on work trends[16], The Notice also mentions the establishment of an assessment procedure and a reward mechanism for the relevant work.

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[13] http://zgh.mas.gov.cn/news/wqww/1710300323554544221.html
[14] http://www.cswomen.org.cn/tzgg/201609/t20160929_1451596.html
[15] http://www.hefei.cc/weixin/a176208.html

To further improve the population's awareness of social assistance policies and the credibility of social assistance activities, on October 31, 2017, the Bureau of Civil Affairs of Gulou District, Fuzhou City, issued the "Notice on Launching the 2017 Publicity Campaign for Social Assistance Policies" with the objective of further promoting the publicizing of the policies relevant to Dibao, the guarantees for the low-income groups of near-to-Dibao recipients and temporary assistance. These policies include the standards of benefits and the procedures for applying for a benefit. The Notice requires "all towns and communities to make full use of the various kinds of media such as government websites, display boards for government affairs, and LED displays etc. to broadcast or post publicity slogans for widely disseminating the information on, and policies relating to, social assistance" [17]. The goal is to facilitate the public's understanding of the specific provisions of the social assistance policies. For these, some slogans are prepared, such as "open up policies on social assistance, open up channels for assistance, and welcome oversight from all walks of life!"18. The slogan reflects the clear idea, and the orientation, of social assistance policies.

3.4 The dissemination of information and monitoring and evaluating social assistance

Including an authority's performance relating to the publicising of social assistance policy as an indicator in the system of performance evaluation helps to strengthen the dissemination of information and the publicising of social assistance policy. The publicizing of policy and the dissemination of information are important components of the management of social assistance. They are necessary approaches to meeting the requirements for improving the performance of social assistance activities. In recent years, during the legalization of social assistance, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the local civil affairs authorities have attached great importance to the publicizing of social assistance policies and have taken effective measures to promote the dissemination of information and policy advocacy. The publicizing of the policy is reaching more and more people. This has enabled the public to better understand the relevant policies relating to social assistance. It has had a positive effect on the protection of the population's rights and in helping poor people to receive benefits. Furthermore, it has also promoted the standardization of the social assistance system. At the national level, in 2015, the General Office of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the General Office of the Ministry of Finance issued the 2015 Indicators and Standards for Performance Evaluation on the Work for the Minimum Living Guarantee Program in All Provinces (Autonomous Regions, and Municipalities Directly under the Central Government). This document included the people's "Policy awareness rate" as one of the indicators[19] in the evaluation of the work of the social assistance agencies under every local government. As prescribed, to calculate the awareness rate for publicizing policy, the method is a sample investigation. The performance in this regard is scored, with 4 as the highest mark. This is a national promotion of the dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policy in the provinces, the autonomous regions and the municipalities directly under the Central Government. It reflects the fact that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policy. At the local level, the publicizing of the policies related to social assistance and the raising of the awareness levels of these policies are also set as indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the social assistance system. For example, for strengthening the urban social assistance activities, improving the quality of the management and the efficiency of the public financing of social assistance, and effectively protecting the rights of people in need of assistance for a basic livelihood, the joint conference of Shanghai's social assistance on August 10, 2015 passed the "Measures for Performance Evaluation of Shanghai's Social Assistance (trial)". Among the Indicators and Criteria for the Performance Evaluation of Shanghai's Social Assistance, there are criteria such as "policy publicity" and the "in-depth policy publicity" and the "high-rate of policy awareness". They are recorded with points in the evaluation. As stipulated, "Timely publicity of social assistance policies in effect through writing or multimedia is equal to 2 points in the performance evaluation; but if the information relating to policy is publicized but without timely updating, no points will be scored." "According to the sampling investigation, the questionnaire survey or a telephone survey, if 80% or more people know the policies, the performance is rated as 2 points. For every 1% reduction in the awareness rate, there will be a 0.1 points reduction in the evaluation score with and 0 is the minimum score." [20]

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[16] Notice of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Civil Affairs Office on publicizing the policy of strengthening the social assistance system, http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/yw/shjz/dfzc/201209/20120909357553.shtml

[17] Notice on carrying out propaganda activities of social assistance policy in 2017, http://www.gl.gov.cn/archive/2017/11/7/799604.html

[18] Notice on carrying out propaganda activities of social assistance policy in 2017, http://www.gl.gov.cn/archive/2017/11/7/799604.html

Table 8: Part of the "Measures for Performance Evaluation of Shanghai's Social Assistance (trial)

Indicator system	Evaluation content	Key points of evaluation	Score	Detailed grading rule
	Accurate assistance	Those who deserve assistance get assistance	3	According to a certain proportion of the social assistance recipients, the accuracy rate of assistance reached 98% and 3 points will be awarded. Deduct 0.5 points for each percentage point reduction until it is completed.
Work	Policy	In-depth policy publicity	2	Two points will be awarded for the timely disclosure of the current social

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[19] http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/yw/shjz/fgwj/201605/20160500000366.shtml

[20] http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node8/node194/u1ai40981.html

performance	publicity			assistance policy by means of written or multimedia; Although the policy is open, if the policy is not updated in time, no score will be awarded.
		Policy awareness is high	2	Take a sampling method, questionnaire or telephone survey to survey the public and social assistance recipients' understanding of social assistance work. If the awareness rate is higher than or equal to 80%, two points will be obtained. Deduct 0.1 points for each percentage point reduction until the deduction is completed.
	Letters and visits	Handle letters and visits properly	3	If the complaint reporting is handled effectively and the complaint reporting is handled properly, the score shall be 3.Otherwise, no score.

Source "Measures for the Performance Evaluation of Shanghai's Social Assistance (trial), http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node8/node194/u1ai40981.html

3.5 Different modes of publicising social assistance policy

In publicising social assistance policy local governments at all levels have undertaken various activities to carry out the dissemination of public information and the publicising of social assistance policy. These have become an important activity way and the dissemination of public information has taken on different methods and work modes. Today there are various paths taken to disseminate the information relating to social assistance and to publicise social assistance policies. These are important approaches to disseminating information about social assistance.

3.5.1 Administrative policy publicity mode based on administrative power led social assistance policy

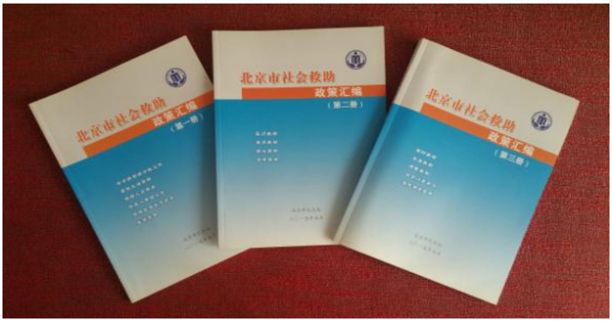
At present, in respect of the publicising of social assistance policy, the Civil Affairs department plays the leading and is the main player in disseminating information on the policies. In practice the Civil Affairs department plays the leading role for the government and carries out the activities relating to publicising social assistance policy through various means, including the setting up of advisory desks, display panels, hanging up promotional banners, posting posters, distributing promotional folders and brochures, and so on.

The first approach was to print "Compilation of Social Assistance Policies".

In recent years, China's social assistance program has developed rapidly, and the legalization in this field has been continuously strengthened. Relevant authorities have issued many policies and regulations. These require relevant personnel, especially the administrators of social assistance to fully understand and accurately implement the social assistance policies.

Thus, the compilation of related social assistance policies promulgated by the different authorities and over different periods is a practical need in advancing the dissemination of information and promoting the orderly development of social assistance activities. In Beijing, the governmental authority responsible for social assistance has produced publications related to the policies relevant to social assistance issued by the State Council, the Beijing municipal government, and the relevant departments of the Beijing municipal government. These policies are about the Dibao benefit, support for the persons in extreme poverty, the identification of low-income households, the checking of household economic conditions, the supervision and the management of the programs, medical assistance, education assistance, employment assistance, legal assistance, temporary assistance, housing assistance, heating assistance, and the participation of social forces in social assistance. These policies were collated and compiled into books, which become the policy basis of social assistance management.

Figure 8: Policy compilation relating to Social Assistance in Beijing



Source: Photo of covers of the compilation of social assistance policies in Beijing

The second approach is to set up bulletin boards for the publicizing of social assistance policies.

Setting up bulletin boards for the publicizing of social assistance policies is a popular practice in the publicizing of social assistance policies especially at the level of street office and communities. This approach has two types of activity – an actual bulletin board set up in the communities and online bulletin boards[21]**.** In this respect, Hengshan town uses the publicity bulletin board for its publicizing of social assistance policies.

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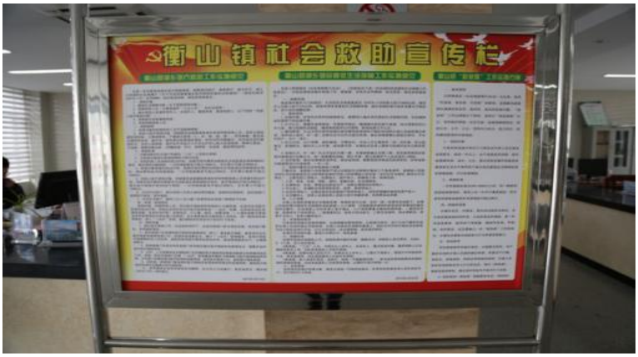
[21] Social assistance policy bulletin board，http://xxgk.pingxiang.gov.cn/lhx/xzbmxxgk/xmzj/gzdt/zwdt/201707/t20170727_1621005.htm

Figure 9: Social assistance bulletin board in Hengshan town



Source: social assistance bulletin board in publicity Hengshan town, http://www.ahhuoshan.gov.cn/openness/detail/content/56776c31e1d5bdd9a32e009e.html

The third approach is to carry out publicity activities relating to social assistance policy in various other forms.

The publicizing of social assistance policies is an important way to achieve the dissemination of information. It is also the traditional way of doing that. The publicizing of social assistance policy plays an important role in expanding the social impact of social assistance and in improving the public's awareness of social assistance policies. In the practice of information dissemination and publicizing social assistance policy, local governments, especially grass-roots social assistance staff have continuously developed innovative forms of publicity related to social assistance and accordingly many new practices and experiences have appeared. These practices include:

1) Establishment of a publicity team. For this, the authorities select persons (officials) with a rich theoretical knowledge and practical experience in the field of social assistance to form a group for publicizing social assistance policies. This group is responsible for conducting publicity campaigns and trainings about social assistance policies, especially the benefit standards, the conditions for applying for, and the approval procedures for getting the urban or rural Dibao, the urban or rural medical assistance, temporary assistance, etc.

2) Carrying out publicity activities relating to social assistance on important days. For example, on days like the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, the National Day for Disaster Prevention and Reduction (May 12), and the China Charity Day (September 5th) , some local authorities of Civil Affairs carry out publicity activities concerning the interpretation of social assistance policies for people, including benefit standards and application conditions. This of course has increased the public's understanding of social assistance policies.

3）Continuous innovation of the means of disseminating information and publicizing policies related to social assistance. In this regard, the Chongqing Municipality had introduced three measures to intensify the publicizing of social assistance policies， including expanding the content of the publicity, expanding the scope of the publicity and innovating the format of the publicity. In particular, the publicizing of social assistance policy is carried out through the broadcast of "village radio" and the display and posting of cartoons. In addition, they organize and carry out activities related to social assistance policy in schools, to medical aid policy in hospitals and other activities, like using the bus to carry out "bus publicity".

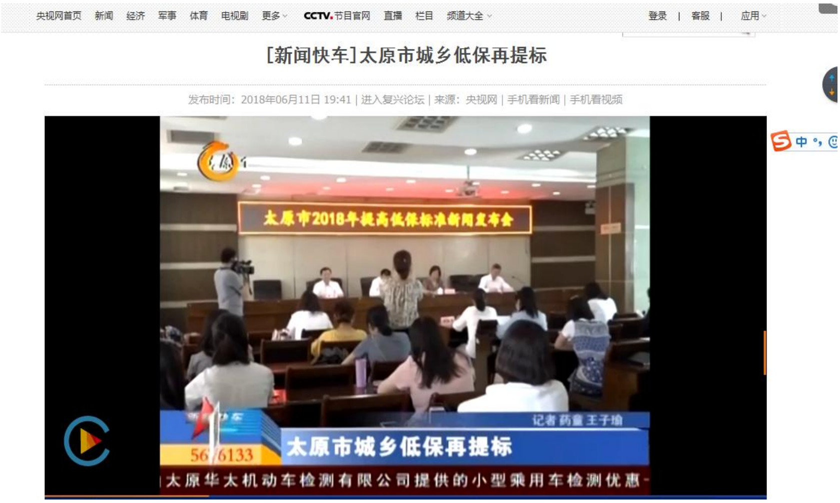
4）Public education month (or week) for publicizing the policy related to social assistance

In recent years, the launch of the public education month (week) related to publicizing social assistance policies is a major method of publicizing social assistance policy at local civil affairs authorities. It is carried out more widely by the management of social assistance authorities at district and county level. During the one-week or one-month period publicity activities relating to the policies of the urban and the rural Dibao program, the urban and the rural medical assistance program, the temporary assistance program, the rural five-guarantees support program and other social assistance programs are the main topics. In these activities the conditions and procedures for applying for a benefit can be clearly explained to the public. Publicity is also undertaken via the various media (television, newspapers, and networks). At the same time, social assistance staff hold face-to-face meetings and exchange information with the public to provide them with interpretations of the social assistance policies and answer their questions. For example, in Liaoning province, governments at all levels attach great importance to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of social assistance policies. They make a great effort in this area. The relevant governmental authorities hold publicity activities every month on the basis of a certain period. The core contents are the policies, the regulations and the documents issued by the National and Provincial Governments, and the major means of publicity are lectures and training. Some of the training is conducted by the senior officials responsible for social assistance giving lectures to the staff or to the public.

3.5.2 Traditional publicity model for social assistance policy based on the traditional media

For a long time, the traditional media, such as newspapers, radio and television, played an important role in the dissemination of social assistance policy. They became important channels, platforms and means for the publicizing of social assistance policies. For example, the China Society News, under the head of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of P.R.C, is an important mass media. The new achievements and new experiences concerning the administration of social assistance have been publicized for a long time, and the new ideas and the new trends in social development in China and overseas at home are introduced in the news, The theory and the practice of social development and social work in China are discussed and reflected in its reports. The national policy and local practice on the reform and development of the social assistance system play an important role in promoting the policy of social assistance. In recent years, despite the rapid rise of new media, the traditional information models of publicity still serve as an important channel and the official channel for the release, and publicizing, of the policy in the social assistance sphere. For example, some local television stations inform the public about the latest standard of Dibao and its calculation. Television plays its role in expanding the policy awareness of social assistance policies.

Figure 10: Television screen screenshot of the Dibao policy



[新闻快车]太原市城乡低保再提标

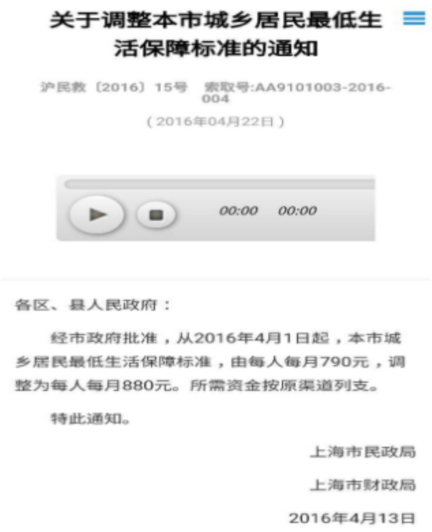
发布时间：2018年06月11日 19:41 | 进入复兴论坛 | 来源：央视网 | 手机看新闻 | 手机看视频

Source:http://news.cctv.com/2018/06/11/VIDE8YzbdR6RZTx3jPxthDGF180611.shtml

In recent years, with the rapid development of the Internet, the trend towards the combination of the traditional media and the new media has become increasingly prominent. They have been used in publicizing the social assistance policy and its practices. The application of multimedia in the dissemination of information about social assistance is an effective way of disseminating information. Media including newspapers, radio and TV have been acting as the disseminators of social assistance policy and the combination of the traditional media and the internet are a new trend in the dissemination of information about social assistance. For example, using multimedia (audio player) for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policy is the standard practice used by social assistance in China today.

Today the Internet has become an important medium for the dissemination of information and for publicizing the policies relating to China's social assistance program. However, due to the large number of social assistance policies introduced in recent years, and since social assistance has a strong professional nature to it, specific requirements have been developed in respect of the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to put the social assistance programs. With respect to the structure of the beneficiaries of social assistance benefits, including their age structure and their educational structure, we see that the educational attainments of some social assistance recipients and the members of poor families are low. Some social assistance recipients suffer from both physical and mental disabilities and it is difficult for them to understand the information and the policies relating to social assistance. This can directly affect the work necessary for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of the policies relating to the social assistance programs. With the use of the Internet as a platform for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of the policies relating to the social assistance programs the combination of text publishing and audio broadcasting is more than enough to enable the public and the target groups under social assistance to access the necessary information and to understand the policies in a better way. Therefore, people are able to safeguard their lawful rights and to protect their interests. An accurate understanding of the policies and the regulations facilitates the harmonious operation of the social assistance system. In this regard, Shanghai has a new practice. The local authority uses the way of audio player combining policy text and online reading to undertake the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policy relating to social assistance to help the target groups and the public to gain a good understanding of social assistance policies. For example, the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Finance issued the Notice on Adjusting the Dibao Standard for Urban and Rural Residents in Shanghai[22], and published the full text of the Notice on their official websites, together with an audio broadcast, which can be replayed. This has improved the impact of the publicizing of social assistance policies.

Figure 11: Web-page screenshot of Shanghai civil affairs website



关于调整本市城乡居民最低生活保障标准的通知

沪民救〔2016〕15号　索取号:AA9101003-2016-004

（2016年04月22日）

各区、县人民政府：

经市政府批准，从2016年4月1日起，本市城乡居民最低生活保障标准，由每人每月790元，调整为每人每月880元。所需资金按原渠道列支。

特此通知。

上海市民政局
上海市财政局
2016年4月13日

Source：http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node687/u1ai45626.html

3.5.3 New media in promoting social assistance policy based on new media developments

Firstly, the Internet has become an important platform for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies relating to social assistance. The role of the Internet is these tasks is increasing significantly.

The Internet is increasingly becoming the main channel for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of the policies relating to social assistance. In recent years, along with the popularization and development of the Internet, “Internet + social assistance” has not only become an important ecosystem for social assistance, but also has become an important platform for the operation and the management of social assistance. The Internet is becoming a very important means of disseminating information and publicizing the policies relating to social assistance. It functions as an implementing channel and a publicity platform for social assistance and it helps to expand the coverage of the dissemination of information. In addition, it can also improve the efficiency of the publicizing of the policy relating to social assistance and it therefore plays an important role in the transmission of policy and the supervision of social assistance programs. For the public, it helps to improve their awareness of social assistance policies. In the realization of the “Sunshine Dibao”, the Internet has played an important role. It has reshaped the ways of the management and the operation of social assistance. This has had a profound impact on the development of the social assistance programs. At present, the Internet has become an important platform for publicizing social assistance policy at both the Central Government and Local Government levels.

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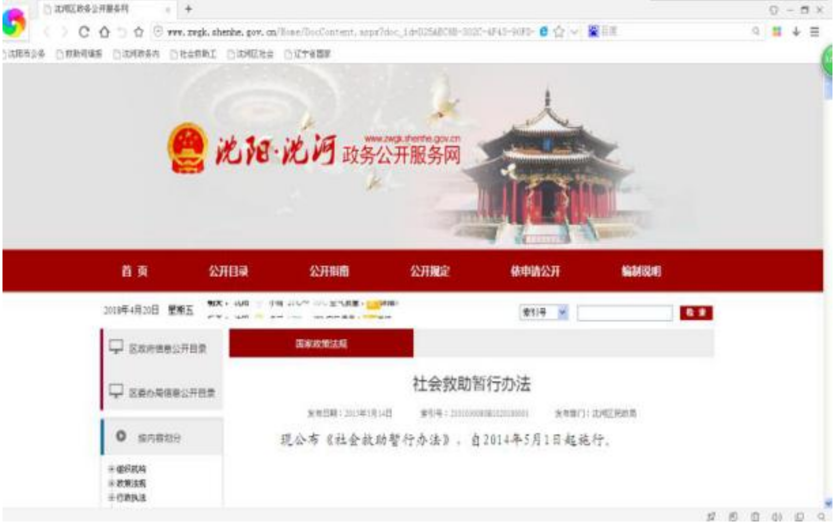
[22] http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node8/node15/node55/node229/node277/u1ai42427.html

For example, after the “Interim Measures for Social Assistance” were promulgated, the task of publicizing the “Intermediate Measures” became important. To do this the local authorities of Civil Affairs publicized the “Interim Measures for Social Assistance” on the official websites of local governments. This was a way to expand the awareness of the Interim Measure among local people. For example, after the introduction of the Interim Measures for social assistance, the full text of the Interim Measures for social assistance was published on the website of http://www.zwgk.shenhe.gov.cn/ affiliated with Shenhe district government under Shenyang government. In this way the publicity and the influence of the Interim Measures relating to social assistance were expanded.

Figure 12: Web-page screenshot of http://www.zwgk.shenhe.gov.cn/



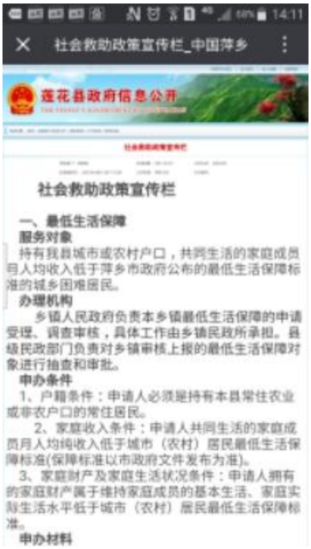
社会救助暂行办法

现公布《社会救助暂行办法》，自2014年5月1日起施行。

Source: http://www.zwgk.shenhe.gov.cn/

In addition, in respect of the policy advocacy of social assistance, some local governments set up their own online social assistance webpage. For example, the Civil Affairs Bureau of the Lianhua County in Jiangxi Province put a bulletin board relating to social assistance policies on their official website. It served to provide the regular disclosure of information online, including the conditions, the materials, the competent agencies and the procedures for applying for a Dibao benefit, for medical assistance and for the extreme poor benefit. This has facilitated the capacity for their citizens to learn about the policies.

Figure 13：Website screenshot for the policy publicity column relating to social assistance in Lianhua County



社会救助政策宣传栏

一、最低生活保障

服务对象

持有我县城市或农村户口，共同生活的家庭成员月人均收入低于萍乡市政府公布的最低生活保障标准的城乡困难居民。

办理机构

乡镇人民政府负责本乡镇最低生活保障的申请受理、调查审核，具体工作由乡镇民政所承担。县级民政部门负责对乡镇审核上报的最低生活保障对象进行抽查和审批。

申办条件

1、户籍条件：申请人必须是持有本县常住农业或非农户口的常住居民。

2、家庭收入条件：申请人共同生活的家庭成员月人均纯收入低于城市（农村）居民最低生活保障标准(保障标准以市政府文件发布为准)。

3、家庭财产及家庭生活状况条件：申请人拥有的家庭财产属于维持家庭成员的基本生活、家庭实际生活水平低于城市（农村）居民最低生活保障标准。

申办材料

Source:
http://xxgk.pingxiang.gov.cn/lhx/xzbmxxgk/xmzj/gzdt/zwdt/201707/t20170727_1621005.htm

Establishing a civil affairs website in the languages of minorities is also a very helpful way of publicizing social assistance policies. In the real world of disseminating information and publicizing policy related to social assistance in China, it is important to remember that China is a multi-ethnic country. Some local governments establish websites in minority language to release the relevant information and policies and to further expand the coverage of the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance to ethnic minorities. This represents an easier way for the ethnic minority population to better understand social assistance policies and understand the relevant information. For example, the establishment, operation and upgrading of the Mongolian version of the Inner Mongolia charity network further expanded the influence of the charitable public education work and expanded the dissemination of information relating to social assistance policies in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Figure 14: Web-page screenshot of http://www.nmgmztmgyw.com/

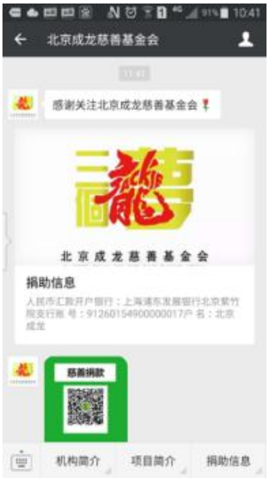
内蒙古自治区民政厅—蒙古文网

Source: http://www.nmgmztmgyw.com/

Thirdly, with the rapid development of the mobile Internet, mobile new media has become an important way to publicize social assistance policies. In recent years, many local Civil Affairs departments have established at We-chat public number for social assistance according to their work needs. Social organizations and foundations also use the mobile new media to carry out information publicity and policy publicity activities.

In the development of social forces participating in social assistance, social organizations (including charitable organizations) have also carried out various publicity activities relating to social assistance. For example, the famous movie star Mr. Jackie Chan founded the Beijing Jackie Chan Charitable Foundation to participate in assistance relating to medicine and education, environmental protection, disaster relief and other aspects. The foundation has established a WeChat public account (clcsjjh), Weibo account (http://weibo.com/jccf), and an official website (http://www.chengloongcishan.org/), on which information on its financing, policies and regulations, internal systems as well as introductions on its projects are published through its website.

Figure 15: Screenshot of the Jackie Chan Charity Foundation's WeChat public number



感谢关注北京成龙慈善基金会

捐助信息

人民币汇款开户银行：上海浦东发展银行北京紫竹院支行账号：91260154900000017户名：北京成龙

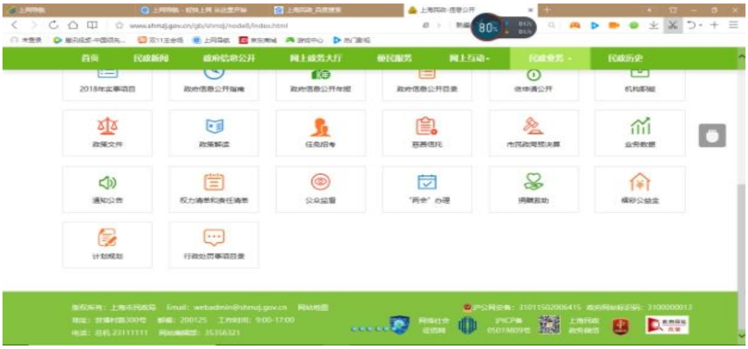
Source: Screenshot of the Jackie Chan Charity Foundation's We-chat public number

4. MAJOR CHALLANGES

4.1 The unbalanced development of the dissemination of information relating to social assistance

The development of ways of publicising social assistance policy and disseminating information relating to social assistance is very uneven across China. The problem of the unbalanced development of the dissemination of dissemination and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance in China is a manifestation of the unbalanced development of social assistance across the country. The lack of balance in this development is demonstrated by the imbalance between the urban areas and the rural areas. In the history of social assistance, the establishment of the Dibao system in the rural areas is shorter than in urban areas. At the same time, social assistance in rural areas is faced with the problem of a lack of high-quality human resources to work on the dissemination of information dissemination and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance. Information relating to social assistance is not well developed in the rural areas. The infrastructure and the facilities needed to disseminate information are inadequate. In practice, social assistance in the rural areas faces problems resulting from the fact that rural residents live in relatively scattered areas. This makes the management of social assistance beneficiaries more difficult. In addition, the educational attainments of rural residents are relatively lower and their awareness of the relevant information is also lower. Their channels for obtaining information are narrow. These problems directly affect the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance with the consequences that there are obvious urban-rural differences in this field. Furthermore, the imbalance in the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance is also demonstrated in an imbalance between the regions. Due to the imbalance of the economic and social development across China, the development of social assistance in the different regions is also characterized by a prominent imbalance. This is manifested in the degree of information relating to social assistance in the different regions, the difference in the social assistance standards and the financial capacity of local governments' to supporting the various social assistance schemes. Differences can also be seen in the regional policies relating to social assistance, the regional efforts made to disseminate information and the regional achievements in promoting the concept of the rule of law in the mind of residents. These differences have greater impact on the dissemination of information related to social assistance in the different regions. For example, Shanghai has strengthened the official website of the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs in respect of the dissemination of information and has set up a government information dissemination column in a prominent location on the website (http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node8/index.html). On this website the dissemination of information relating to social assistance is obvious to visitors to the site. In addition, they have set up web-pages relating to the "policy documents", the "policy interpretation", "public supervision", the "notice bulletin", "plan planning", "donation assistance", "civil affairs business" and others so that in total there are 21 templates on the web page to make the information available to the public in a comprehensive and timely manner.

Figure 16: Screenshot of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Website



Source: Shanghai Civil Affairs Website，http://www.shmzj.gov.cn/gb/shmzj/node8/index.html

4.2 The unsatisfactory level of awareness about information on social assistance

The level of awareness relating to the information about social assistance policy needs to be improved further in China. Over the recent years, in focusing on improving the social assistance system and the governance of poverty, the Central Government and Local Governments at all levels have promulgated and implemented a large number of social assistance policies. These policies have gradually built up a good system of social assistance policies. These polices have directly changed the way the social assistance system operates. They have directly promoted social equity and justice and the protection of the rights and interests for poor families. They work as an institutional guarantee for the functioning of the social assistance programs and for the legalization of the social assistance system. However, as the current social assistance policy is very varied in its content and as it involves different functional departments of the Government, it is highly professional and policy oriented. At the same time, some people lack a comprehensive or in-depth understanding of the policy system of social assistance, especially the members of the Dibao recipient families, whose education level is low. Due to their age, illness, disability or other factors, the cognitive ability of some beneficiaries is also low. This means that they are not capable of understanding the complicated policies. In the absence of the necessary policy interpretation and guidance, the full understanding of the social assistance policies cannot be achieved. In his investigation, the author of this paper found that heating in winter is a common concern for the Dibao recipients in northern China, and that the Dibao families are very concerned about the issue of the payment standards for heating fees. For the delivery of heating subsidies, Beijing has introduced relevant policies which stipulate that the subsidy for the heating season for each beneficiary household is equal to the heating fee for a 60-square-meter residential house. However, some low-income families did not fully know of, or understand, this policy.

4.3 The international dissemination, and exchange of, China's experience with social assistance

Internationalization of the dissemination of information and the publicising of the policies relating to China's social assistance program is not as expected and the international dissemination of China's experiences needs to be improved.

Firstly, China's social policy, including the publicizing of information and the external communication of its social assistance policy, is more limited to the publication and dissemination in the Chinese language as is China's official language. This directly impacts the international dissemination of China's social assistance policy and its experiences of putting social assistance into practice. A typical example is that many of the official websites of civil affairs only have a Chinese language version. In recent years, thanks to the active promotion by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the China-EU Social Assistance Policy Dialogue and the China-EU Social Protection Reform Project and other international cooperation programmes China and foreign countries have been provided with opportunities for the mutual understanding of civilization and the chances to learn from each other by exchanging international experiences in the field of social assistance. In the study of the international experience of social assistance and the exchange of social assistance policies, the practical experience of Chinese social assistance and the results of the rule of law have been public. This has played an active role in the better understanding of social assistance and the social achievements of the governance of poverty in China by foreign countries, especially the EU Member States. At the same time, this has also permitted the dissemination of the Chinese culture and the value China places on social assistance. In recent years, Chinese scholars have written papers concerning China's social assistance and the governance of poverty in international academic journals. This has promoted the publication of and the experience with sharing China's social assistance policies. This has an important social significance and represents an important achievement in the dissemination of China's social assistance culture and institutional civilization. However, overall, the level of international publicity relating to social assistance and the governance of poverty in China is incompatible with the tremendous achievements, and rapid development, of social assistance in China.

Secondly, there is a problem of the unclear information transfer of international publicity relating to social assistance policies and even during the dissemination of information there are problems such as distortions and conflicts with certain pieces of information. For example, on the official website of the Chinese version of the China Charity Federation, the nature of the Federation is explained in this way: "The China Charity Federation is a national non-profit social organization for the public interest registered with, and approved by, the Chinese Government and composed of citizens, legal entities and other social organizations that are enthusiastic about charitable causes". Here, the core of its definition is the "national non-profit social organization for the public interest", but in the English version of the website it is written that “the China Charity Federation (CCF) is a nationwide non-governmental charitable organization”,

4.4 The problem of developing an environment for public opinion on social assistance

Some media organizations and news outlets report negatively on social assistance. This negatively impacts the credibility, and the development, of an environment favourable to social assistance.

As social assistance is an important activity relating to the population’s livelihood it has the distinct characteristics of being fundamental, critical to the population’s livelihood and is an important to the benefit to the population. The management, implementation and operation of social assistance has been the focus of much attention by society as a whole, especially in the context that the mass media have played an important role in its public supervision.

However, the mass media could impose a negative impact on the credibility of social assistance and change the environment for the development of social assistance in some cases. In particular, some negative statements by the mass media have influenced the public’s opinion on social assistance. For example, in the online media, terms like “Dibao chaos”, “Dibao corruption,” and “Dibao’s story of plot” etc. are widely used and appear frequently. These terms distort the image of social assistance and reduce the credibility of social assistance in the mind of the public. Thus, it has had a negative impact on the development of social assistance. To solve this problem, it is, on the one hand, necessary to strengthen the approaches for solving problems that have violated the rights and the interests of the population in the field of social assistance, and therefore increase the fairness and justice within the system of social assistance and to intensify the public’s supervision over social assistance activities. On the other hand, it is also necessary to undertake efforts leading to the mass media making more objective comments on social assistance. For this, there is a need to strengthen the assessment of the effect of the publicity of social assistance policies and a need to build a better environment for the social assistance system.

4.5 The problem of standardizing the dissemination of information on social assistance

The standardization of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance needs to be further improved.

At present, the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies relating to social assistance has achieved positive results. The work done in this field has had a positive impact on promoting the operation and the development of the social assistance system. At the same time, it has also accumulated a lot of practical experiences. Nowadays, an important issue relating to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance is the further improvement of its standardization. This means when improving the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies publicity, standardization must be put on the agenda. It can thereby provide a solid institutional guarantee for the operation and the management of social assistance. However, in this regard, there are problems such as:

Firstly, when it comes to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance, there is a conflict between policy transparency, the dissemination of information and the protection of personal privacy. This means that in different regions, there are different definitions on the content of the information that can be disclosed. The difference has a direct impact on the standardization of the publicizing of the policy related to the social assistance system. Secondly, the dynamic management of social assistance information needs to be further strengthened as the problems related to the updating of information are more prominent. At present, the Internet is the main channel for the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance. The dissemination of information and the publicizing of policy on official websites of the local authorities of civil affairs is a common practice for spreading the information related to social assistance policies in China. However, in practice, there is a large gap among the different regions in terms of the standardization of the dissemination relating to the information on social assistance. In recent years, the institutionalized information publicity system of the Dibao program has represents an important lead in this field and it can ensure the development of this program and the transparency of its public administration. In the Dibao system, the institutionalization of the dissemination of information under the Dibao system has been gradually established since the establishment of the urban Dibao system. It has played an important role in building a fair, standardized and transparent social assistance system, and has gone through the transition from the traditional style of Dibao information publicity to a new type of Dibao information publicity based on the Internet, based on two forms of disseminating information: disclosure in the community (place of residence) and disclosure online. In practice, bulletin boards are set up in the public spaces of towns, streets, and villages and the personal information of Dibao beneficiaries, including the name, home address, number of family members receiving Dibao benefits, and telephone number for public supervision and reporting, are publicized on the boards. In recent years, with the popularization and the development of the Internet, the online disclosure of Dibao beneficiaries' information has become the main method in achieving this, changing the traditional method of publicity and forming a new way of publicizing Dibao information. Despite this development, the types of content for disclosure and the duration of the disclosure differ greatly in the different regions and in different cities.

In Beijing, the contents of the information to be disseminated include the name of the certificate holder of the urban or rural Dibao family, the number of beneficiaries in the family, the monthly amount of the benefit and the street (township) and district where the family lives. The forms for disclosure include: disclosure in the place of residence of the family and disclosure on the official website. Beijing Municipality is implementing the regular disclosure of information on Beijing's Dibao beneficiaries. This requires the authorities to display the information relating to the Dibao recipient households on the public bulletin board and on official website of the district or county government or on the portal website of the local civil affairs agencies[23]. The duration of the Dibao information dissemination is from the date when there is a right of entitlement until the date when the benefit is terminated. This can further supervise and regulate the public administration and use of public funds.

In Guangzhou City, the regular content for disclosure includes the name and residential address of Dibao beneficiaries. [24]

In Chengdu, greater details are required relating to the dissemination of information relating to urban or rural Dibao beneficiaries, including the name of the principal beneficiary in a family, the number of beneficiaries in the family, the gender and the age of the beneficiaries, the community and the street where the beneficiaries live, the monthly income of the family, the monthly Dibao benefit of the family, and whether the beneficiaries are workers under the Dibao program. [25]

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[23] http://epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2013-11/28/content_480684.htm?div=-1

[24] http://www.gdmz.gov.cn/zdshbz/gzs/list.shtml

For the dissemination of information on temporary assistance in Yucheng Street in Xianyou County, Fujian Province, the contents include the beneficiaries' names, ID numbers and bank account with special processing, and the amount of the benefit. [26]

4.6 Insufficient innovation in the dissemination of information relating to social assistance

Innovation in the dissemination of information and the publicising of the policies relating to social assistance is inadequate. In recent years, the publicising of social assistance policies has been highly valued, and the standardization of the dissemination of information relating to social assistance has been strengthened. At the same time, we have accumulated a lot of experience and practice with effective methods. However, the dissemination of information and the publicizing of policies related to social assistance are still dominated by the traditional ways. In general, these are the bulletin boards, propaganda banners, slogans, etc. used to disseminate the policies. These forms and means are incompatible with the development of social assistance in the age of Internet. In practice, the problem is that the methods of disseminating information and advocating policy advocacy are too simple and are obsolete. The coverage of the publicity is limited. The innovations related to the dissemination of information and the publicizing of the policy related to social assistance dissemination is not sufficient and the no good ideas nor innovative methods for applying modern means of communication and integrating them into the fast development of Internet in China. At the same time, there are ideological concerns regarding the use of the non-traditional means for policy publicity. Some staff from the local authorities are afraid of using innovative means since it may lead to unforeseen negative impacts. These may in turn impact the social assistance system and its policies. For example, animated pictures are good way of form improving the effectiveness of the publicity since they can make the information visual. It is also helpful to the public since it is easier for them to understood. As such they can improve the awareness rate of social assistance policies. However, in practice, the grass-roots staff of the civil affairs departments engaged in social assistance have no policy support and institutional guarantees. They fear that the visualization of the social assistance policies may lead the complication of the social assistance policies and for the regulations to become less stringent. They are also afraid that it might even undermine the serious, administrative, and scientific nature of social assistance policies. As a result, they are less courageous in introducing managerial innovations.

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[25] http://gk.chengdu.gov.cn/govInfoPub/detail.action?id=1917975&tn=2
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3.3.3 Publicity of Social Assistance Laws and Regulations (Techniques and instruments used for the dissemination of information)

EU best practice report

Jan De Coninck, EU-China SPRP expert

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ABREVIATIONS:

AT = Austria; BE = Belgium; BG = Bulgaria; CY = Cyprus; CZ = Czech Republic; DE = Germany; DK = Denmark; EE = Estonia; ES = Spain; FI = Finland; FR = France; EL = Greece; HU = Hungary; IE = Ireland; IT = Italy; LT= Lithuania; LU = Luxemburg; LV = Latvia; MT= Malta; NL = The Netherlands; PL = Poland; PT = Portugal; RO = Romania; SE = Sweden; SK = Slovakia; UK= United Kingdom

MIS = Minimum Income Standard

GMIS = Guaranteed Minimum Income Schemes

Executive summary

An information policy set out by a State can help the understanding of its rule of law by all who reside on its territory. Well-informed citizens can use the information to be better informed, to take better control of their lives and to assert their rights. Governments can play an active role in the dissemination of information. The success of its information policy can rely heavily on the success of the dissemination of information provided by a broad range of social organisations which supplement the government’s efforts. In order to better understand the dissemination of information, one has to examine it from three points of view: from the beneficiaries’ perspective, from the perspective of the people providing the social assistance and services and from the Government perspective.

The dissemination of information can play an important role in the effectiveness of the implementation of social policies and in eliminating the non-take-up of social rights. Social assistance schemes can, and will, miss their objective when the information about these schemes hasn’t been spread around. If the individual is unaware of the assistance or his or her entitlement thereto, if one doesn’t understand the application procedure or has a fear of stigmatization or negative attitudes towards beneficiaries by society, then non-take up will occur.

In addition to non-take-up, a stigma can act as a barrier to accessing the social services that are provided by Governments, NGO’s and other organisations. It creates and emphasises an experience of degradation and rejection by society. In doing so, it thus creates a threshold fear for beneficiaries to receive social assistance and social assistance services.

Insights from the behavioural studies show that the dissemination of information alone is just one part of the solution. When presented with choices people in need sometimes need to be helped to make those choices by being given a little push or nudge in the right direction, but without restricting their liberties. Nudge theory uses the idea that small adaptations of the choices that are presented, can help steer persons towards decisions that will benefit them. But, nudging is not easy. The key feature is to understand how people behave in practice so that policy makers can design policy, programs and services better.

In order to better understand how people in need make choices, policy makers can tap straight into the source and the potential use of information and aid provided by beneficiaries who benefited from social assistance and experienced poverty first-hand. By embedding experts by experience into administrative offices to help on policy making and the development of procedures, allows us to shed new light on problems, faults, errors and/or difficulties in the administrative processes,. Their experience and training allows them to observe what changes from the inside might better support people living in poverty and potential beneficiaries. With both the Government and the ex-social assistance beneficiaries working together, it can help to build a better social assistance and address the gaps in the system that separated the poor from other people in society.

Once a better understanding of the informational needs is established, policy makers can tackle the dissemination of information via a multi-channel approach towards possible beneficiaries. Providing information can be done through online media (social media, websites, WeChat) and offline media (leaflets, brochures, posters). Both media can reinforce one another when both are referencing each other for more information. Similar practices can be used to provide information for social workers and other policy executioners in order to standardize practices.

1. THE DEFINITION OF INFORMATION POLICY AND THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Information policy is a set of laws, regulations and policies that regulate the creation, implementation, storage, communication and dissemination of all kinds of information. It encompasses any decision-making practice, policy implementation, public management and public service with either local or society-wide constitutive efforts that involve the flow of information and how it is processed. [27]

Briefly stated, an information policy set out by a State can help the understanding of its rule of law by all citizens and other persons who reside on its territory. Well-informed citizens can use the information provided by the different institutions to be better informed, to take better control of their lives, to participate in decision-making, to assert their rights and even to press for further improvements.

Not only can this be used to promote information to better inform everyone, it can also help to standardize the practices and the implementation of practices, as well as having secondary benefits such as helping to prevent corruption.

As Governments have several roles and responsibilities, these can also include providing accurate information, producing and maintaining information that meets the specific needs of the public and of the policy executioners (e.g. provincial government, local government, social workers etc) by making informed decisions on which information should be disseminated and how to distribute it effectively.

Although a Government can play an active role in information policy, it can rely heavily on the success of the dissemination of information on other subjects such as the social assistance provided by a broad range of social organisations which supplement the Government’s efforts.

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[27] Braman Sandra, Defining Information Policy, 2015, Journal of Information Policy, DOI: 10.5325/jinfopoli.1.2011.0001

With the introduction of the law on access to Government information in 2007[28], China has also benefited from having a better informed public in making and enforcing laws and decisions. Its Open Government Information Regulations also disclose a wide range of government-held information at all levels. Regarding its social assistance system, the information policy on the dissemination of information is an extension of its own rule of law and includes the spread off all existing information, knowledge, interpretation and opinions nation-wide on all parts of the decision-making process, policy implementation, public management, public service and performance, without any exceptions.

In order to better understand the dissemination of information about social assistance and social assistance services, we need to take a look at how citizens can be better informed on the broader range of aid and services that they can expect to get access to. Therefore, several European best practices on the dissemination of can provide useful examples.

We have to examine this from three points of view. Firstly, from a beneficiaries' perspective. The information that is provided has to be useful in helping the beneficiaries to get the help they need, to better inform them about their personal situation, about a possible better future and then to encourage them to seek out help.

Secondly, from the perspective of the people providing the social assistance and services. The information has to be useful for social workers in providing help and services for the people in need. They need to be well-informed about the expectations of the Government on the one hand and the expectations and the real needs of the beneficiaries on the other.

Thirdly, from a Government perspective: the policy and the decision makers need to be well informed about the needs, the demographics of the beneficiaries, the services rendered, the problems social workers come across so as to be able to improve upon the existing policies and create new ones.

The flow of information that is required can't only follow a top-to-bottom pattern but has to follow a path in several different directions according to the (possible) needs of the recipient. From the top towards the bottom and back again, but also in between levels to exchange good practices and other data.

One can also expands this flow of information on social assistance and social services, with data on other services and with help from other social or government organisations, useful in helping the beneficiaries. The argument thus presented here is to provide a package of information on all levels.

1.1 Closing the gap: the dissemination of information in order to increase the coverage of social assistance services usage and reducing the non-take-up of social rights

The dissemination of information on social assistance and social assistance services can play an important role in the effectiveness of the implementation of social policies and eliminating the non-take-up of social rights. Social assistance schemes can miss their objective of reducing poverty and exclusion when the information about these schemes hasn't been spread around adequately e.g. when non-take-up is due to a lack of knowledge of the available benefits. This can also create an unequal treatment between those who know about the benefits and those who don't. This lack of information is, together with the stigmatization of

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[28] Chinese Law and Government, 2015, Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Open Government Information, https://doi.org/10.1080/00094609.2015.1048135

the people in need, the conditionality of the benefits and the administrative procedures some of the several reasons why residents in the European Union don’t take up their social rights.

1.1.1 What is non-take-up?

The non-take-up of social assistance is defined by a person (or a household) who is eligible for social assistance but who for one or more reasons does not claim it. This non-take-up implies that the social security or social assistance scheme does not work efficiently. It is quantified by a non-take-up rate which is the percentage of people who do not receive the benefit compared to the population that is eligible for the benefit.[29]

The need to reduce the non-take-up rate is recognized by the European Commission[30] which estimated that the non-take-up of social benefits is between 40 and 65% within the European Union. Evidence was documented in the Eurofound[31] study which found proof of this widespread problem across the Europe Union in more than half of the Member States.

A Eurofound study stated that reducing the non-take-up may increase public expenditure in the short run, but in the long run, the overall expenditures of every Member State may decrease. It shows that in some cases, claiming benefits may prevent situations that in the future will have a higher cost if not tackled in the present. If people are unable to pay for, or get access to, services now, the situation may deteriorate in the long run, resulting in higher public expenditure for a country. Reducing the non-take-up can help EU Member States to achieve their poverty targets such as the Europe 2020 targets, or at least alleviate poverty in the more extreme cases[32].

According to a European Social Policy Network (ESPN) study, in some countries non-take-up is not divided equally between potential beneficiaries. The results suggest that non-take-up is highest among the most vulnerable categories (BE, FR). One of the most vulnerable groups is without doubt homeless people.[33]

Figure 1: Estimates of the non-take-up of monetary social benefits in the EU Member States since 2000[34]

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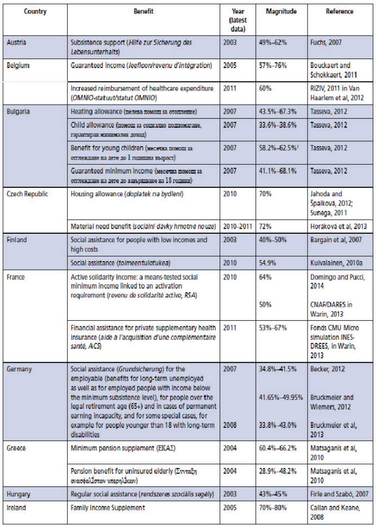

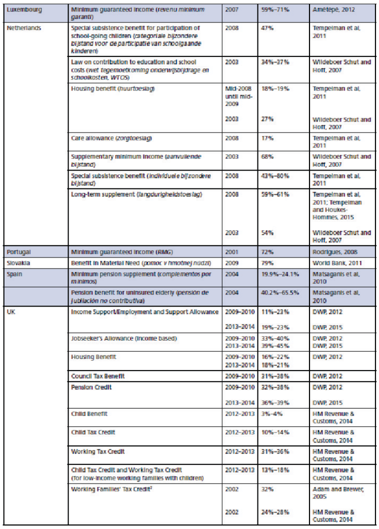

Country	Benefit	Year (latest data)	Magnitude	Reference
Austria	Subsistence support (*Hilfe zur Sicherung des Lebensunterhalts*)	2003	49%–62%	Fuchs, 2007
Belgium	Guaranteed income (*leefloon/revenu d'intégration*)	2005	57%–76%	Bouckaert and Schokkaert, 2011
	Increased reimbursement of healthcare expenditure (*OMNIO-statuut/statut OMNIO*)	2011	60%	RIZIV, 2011 in Van Haarlem et al, 2012
Bulgaria	Heating allowance (целева помощ за отопление)	2007	43.5%–67.3%	Tasseva, 2012
	Child allowance (помощ за социално подпомагане, гарантиран минимален доход)	2007	33.6%–38.6%	Tasseva, 2012
	Benefit for young children (месечна помощ за отглеждане на дете до 1 годишна възраст)	2007	58.2%–62.5%[1]	Tasseva, 2012
	Guaranteed minimum income (месечна помощ за отглеждане на дете до завършване на 18 години)	2007	41.1%–68.1%	Tasseva, 2012
Czech Republic	Housing allowance (*doplatek na bydlení*)	2010	70%	Jahoda and Špalková, 2012; Sunega, 2011
	Material need benefit (*sociální dávky hmotné nouze*)	2010–2011	72%	Horáková et al, 2013
Finland	Social assistance for people with low incomes and high costs	2003	40%–50%	Bargain et al, 2007
	Social assistance (*toimeentulotukea*)	2010	54.9%	Kuivalainen, 2010a
France	Active solidarity income: a means-tested social minimum income linked to an activation requirement (*revenu de solidarité active, RSA*)	2010	64% 50%	Domingo and Pucci, 2014 CNAF/DARES in Warin, 2013
	Financial assistance for private supplementary health insurance (*aide à l'acquisition d'une complémentaire santé, ACS*)	2011	53%–67%	Fonds CMU Micro simulation INES-DREES, in Warin, 2013
Germany	Social assistance (*Grundsicherung*) for the employable (benefits for long-term unemployed as well as for employed people with income below the minimum subsistence level), for people over the legal retirement age (65+) and in cases of permanent earning incapacity, and for some special cases, for example for people younger than 18 with long-term disabilities	2007 2008	34.8%–41.5% 41.65%–49.95% 33.8%–43.0%	Becker, 2012 Bruckmeier and Wiemers, 2012 Bruckmeier et al, 2013
Greece	Minimum pension supplement (ΕΚΑΣ)	2004	60.4%–66.2%	Matsaganis et al, 2010
	Pension benefit for uninsured elderly (Συνταξη ανασφαλΐστων υπερηλΐκων)	2004	28.9%–48.2%	Matsaganis et al, 2010
Hungary	Regular social assistance (*rendszeres szociális segély*)	2003	43%–45%	Firle and Szabó, 2007
Ireland	Family Income Supplement	2005	70%–80%	Callan and Keane, 2008
Luxembourg	Minimum guaranteed income (*revenu minimum garanti*)	2007	59%–71%	Amétépé, 2012
Netherlands	Special subsistence benefit for participation of school-going children (*categoriale bijzondere bijstand voor de participatie van schoolgaande kinderen*)	2008	47%	Tempelman et al, 2011
	Law on contribution to education and school costs (*wet tegemoetkoming onderwijsbijdrage en schoolkosten, WTOS*)	2003	34%–37%	Wildeboer Schut and Hoff, 2007
	Housing benefit (*huurtoeslag*)	Mid-2008 until mid-2009 2003	18%–19% 27%	Tempelman et al, 2011 Wildeboer Schut and Hoff, 2007
	Care allowance (*zorgtoeslag*)	2008	17%	Tempelman et al, 2011
	Supplementary minimum income (*aanvullende bijstand*)	2003	68%	Wildeboer Schut and Hoff, 2007
	Special subsistence benefit (*individuele bijzondere bijstand*)	2008	43%–80%	Tempelman et al, 2011
	Long-term supplement (*langdurigheidstoeslag*)	2008 2003	59%–61% 54%	Tempelman et al, 2011; Tempelman and Houkes-Hommes, 2015 Wildeboer Schut and Hoff, 2007
Portugal	Minimum guaranteed income (*RMG*)	2001	72%	Rodrigues, 2008
Slovakia	Benefit in Material Need (*pomoc v hmotnej núdzi*)	2009	79%	World Bank, 2011
Spain	Minimum pension supplement (*complementos por mínimos*)	2004	19.9%–24.1%	Matsaganis et al, 2010
	Pension benefit for uninsured elderly (*pensión de jubilación no contributiva*)	2004	40.2%–65.5%	Matsaganis et al, 2010
UK	Income Support/Employment and Support Allowance	2009–2010 2013–2014	11%–23% 19%–23%	DWP, 2012 DWP, 2015
	Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)	2009–2010 2013–2014	33%–40% 39%–45%	DWP, 2012 DWP, 2015
	Housing Benefit	2009–2010 2013–2014	16%–22% 18%–21%	DWP, 2012
	Council Tax Benefit	2009–2010	31%–38%	DWP, 2012
	Pension Credit	2009–2010 2013–2014	32%–38% 36%–39%	DWP, 2012 DWP, 2015
	Child Benefit	2012–2013	3%–4%	HM Revenue & Customs, 2014
	Child Tax Credit	2012–2013	10%–14%	HM Revenue & Customs, 2014
	Working Tax Credit	2012–2013	31%–36%	HM Revenue & Customs, 2014
	Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit (for low-income working families with children)	2012–2013	13%–18%	HM Revenue & Customs, 2014
	Working Families' Tax Credit[2]	2002 2002	32% 24%–28%	Adam and Brewer, 2005 HM Revenue & Customs, 2014

A FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless)[35] study states that the data on the take-up of benefits by homeless people is hard to come by. So the information can be fragmentary as they based on some small surveys. The results do provide useful insights, although one has to keep in mind that these may not reflect the national situation accurately.

The results imply that in countries where people experiencing homelessness are left to claim for the benefit by themselves, the non-take-up rate is higher. Those people who are experiencing homelessness and who were staying in accommodation for the homeless have a lower non-take-up rate than among those people who are sleeping in the street or even those who staying with friends.

1.1.2 Reasons for non-take-up

The reasons behind the non-take-up can be explained by, and approached from, different points of view. The influencing factors can be classified at four levels: factors related to the administration, to the benefit design of social assistance, to individual level factors and even to how society treats and looks at the people in need [36].

For the **individual**, the reasons for non-take-up can be: lack of awareness concerning the benefit, unawareness of an entitlement, insufficient knowledge of the application procedure, fear of stigmatization, attitudes towards dependency on society, the process is perceived as time-consuming and not worth the level of effort and personal difficulties such as difficulties filling in the forms or illiteracy.

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[35] Natalie Boccadero (2014): Non Take Up of Minimum Income Schemes among the Homeless Population, Final Thematic Report, FEANTSA,

[36] Van Oorschot (1991): The Non-take-up of Social Security benefits in Europe. Journal of European Social Policy, vol. 1, pp. 15-30.

For the **administration**, the factors that can contribute to the non-take up are: complex application procedures, procedures that are inaccessible for claimants, poor and erroneous decision-making, slow assessment, limited staff and lack of skills by the staff.

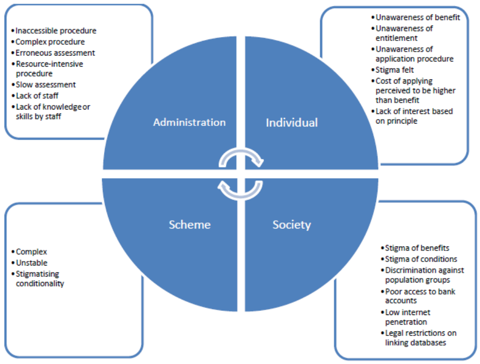
The social assistance **schemes** can increase the non-take-up further if they are: **complex** and/or increase the **stigmatization of beneficiaries in society** by conditioning access and other related issues.

These factors are often interlinked and results from the case studies compiled by Eurofound suggest that the various reasons for non-take-up may apply to one individual. The study suggests that non-take-up among vulnerable groups may be best explained by a mix of reasons related to the lack of information, costly or complex access and social barriers[37]:

- **The lack of information:** lack of awareness or misperceptions about the benefit, entitlement or application procedures;
- **The costliness or complexity of access:** inhibiting complexity of the application procedure, or a lack of resources such as time, the ability to find one’s way through the system, or the inability to travel to the welfare or employment office;
- **The social barriers:** stigma or perception of stigma – sometimes linked to the conditions tied to a benefit or to the application procedure, pride, or lack of trust in institutions.

It has been emphasized that in practice the different levels contribute to the non-take-up as a whole and in many cases, it might not be possible to pinpoint just a single reason for non-take-up.

Figure 2: Reasons for non-take-up[38]


•Inaccessible procedure
•Complex procedure
•Erroneous assessment
•Resource-intensive procedure
•Slow assessment
•Lack of staff
•Lack of knowledge or skills by staff
•Unawareness of benefit
•Unawareness of entitlement
•Unawareness of application procedure
•Stigma felt
•Cost of applying perceived to be higher than benefit
•Lack of interest based on principle
Administration
Individual
Scheme
Society
•Complex
•Unstable
•Stigmatising conditionality
•Stigma of benefits
•Stigma of conditions
•Discrimination against population groups
•Poor access to bank accounts
•Low internet penetration
•Legal restrictions on linking databases

Source: Eurofound, building on Van Oorschot (1995)

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[37] Eurofound (2015), Access to social benefits: Reducing non-take-up, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. (https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1536en.pdf)

[38] Source: Eurofound (2015), Access to social benefits: reducing non-take-up, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1536en.pdf

Other studies collaborate the results mentioned above. A typology made by the French Observatory relating to the non-take-up of aids and services (*Observatoire des non-recours aux droits et services)*[39] used by FEANTSA[40] sees non-take-up as rights that were not taken because: they are unknown, unclaimed, unobtained or seized by someone between the client and the administration.

1.1.2.1 Unknown rights and the lack of communication

In most European countries, non-take-up mainly occurs because individuals do not know about the existence of a social assistance scheme or do not know how to claim a benefit under it. The information just doesn't get to the people in need. In some countries it was seen that the claimants should be responsible **themselves** for finding out the relevant information regarding the benefit and how to claim for it. The system doesn't reach out to them. Also, the complexity of the scheme may lead to a higher level of non-take up rates. These examples show the interlinkage between the individual level and the scheme level reasons for non-take-up.

1.1.2.2 Unclaimed rights and offer relevancy

This type of non-take-up refers to the situation whereby the beneficiary knows that he/she is entitled to a benefit but **decides** not to claim it. For example, there may be costs connected to the claiming of the benefit that may be more than the amount of the benefit.

These costs can take different forms: they can be financial, material, cognitive, physical or psychological. Material and cognitive costs are related to filling in the forms, the complex procedures and the many documents required. Physical costs are related to not being able to access the services in for example the rural areas, while psychological costs are to do with stigma and shame.

If rights are unclaimed by **choice**, they are related to the conditions of the scheme. These include activation measures, means-testing, controlling or putting in place conditions for receiving the benefit. In some countries the role of social worker was the reason for non-take-up. The controlling role of the social worker was seen as problematic.

1.1.2.3 Unobtained rights and administrative obstacles

According to the FEANTSA report, unobtained rights refer to the situations where applicants have claimed for the benefit but have not completed the process. This was mainly due to administrative issues such as the poor working of the administration and the strong discretionary elements in the system. Also, in some countries the introduction of additional, complex procedures and making arbitrary rejections were linked to non-take-up.

1.1.2.4 Discarded rights and the opinion of social intermediaries

This type of non-take-up is related to the intermediaries (such as social workers, NGOs, etc.) discouraging the potential beneficiaries from claiming for the benefit. No evidence of these practices was found by FEANTSA; however, it was pointed out that these intermediaries can greatly improve the take-up by providing information and guidance on the benefits.

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[39] Observatoire des non-recours aux droits et aux services, IEP Grenoble, France

[40] Natalie Boccadero (2014): Non Take Up of Minimum Income Schemes among the Homeless Population, Final Thematic Report, FEANTSA,

Collaboration with third-parties which are working with people in need, should be encouraged so that they can provide the correct information and services.

1.1.3 Suggestions to reduce non-take-up

In the report of the European Minimum Income Network (EMIN), countries have made recommendations on how to reduce the non-take-up. These include the automatic granting of rights, the simplification of the system, faster administrative procedures, outreaching to the communities, qualified social workers who inform the population about their rights to the Minimum Income, the establishment of one-stop-shops, better coordination between administrations, introducing a case-manager and separating social work from its function of control.

In the FEANTSA report similar suggestions on reducing the level of non-take-up have been put forward:

- Information campaigns
- Pro-active administration to look for potential beneficiaries
- Simplify application procedures and provide assistance in filling in the forms
- Flexibility in proving eligibility
- Standardized rules to reduce uncertainty in claims process
- Establishing easily accessible appeal procedures
- Increasing the coordination between the different social security programs
- Developing one-shop-stops
- Considering the effects of tax reforms
- More data and research on non-take-up

According to the Eurofound study, at the administrative level, non-take-up could be reduced by simplifying the procedures and by providing simple information about the benefit. In Belgium and in the Netherlands information on how to improve the system is gathered from those who have not taken up the benefit. Information on how to improve the system and how to better disseminate information on social assistance can also be collaborated with the people who have received help. Belgium presented its findings on these practices and was nominated at the 7th European Quality Conference in Vilnius (see 1.5).

A proactive benefit system instead would make applications redundant. Benefits could be initiated automatically, based on registry data. Life events (such as loss of job, birth of a child etc) could be registered in the database so that when they occur, service providers would receive the information. The Belgian Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS) is an example of how between 3.000 actors in the social sector a maximum number of social benefits and subsidiary rights are automatically granted without citizens having to make declarations anymore[41].

At the scheme level, simple, transparent and stable entitlement criteria may have positive impacts on take-up. If entitlement criteria change between regions or municipalities, specific information is needed to explain the difference. If the criteria are the same but the take-up is affected by the interpretation of the rules and by criteria, extra information has to flow to those who have to put the social assistance schemes into practice.

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[41] https://www.ksz-bcss.fgov.be

In order to reduce non-take-up, the benefit systems should also be stable. Regular changes to social assistance schemes and their services make it more difficult for people to be aware of the entitlement criteria as well as for social workers, welfare centres, NGO's and other organization to communicate about them and implement these changes.

There are also several ways to reduce the level of non-take-up by focusing on the individual level. For example, NGOs who work with groups with a high (risk of) non-take-up, can work together with other organizations to better reach the people who do not claim the benefits. Public organizations or welfare centres could also cooperate with other public organizations in order to reduce the level of non-take-up. In doing so, one organization doesn't have to try to reach out to all possible beneficiaries but can limit its actions to a specific target group to provide better care. This, as long as the whole of the social assistance workforce (NGO's, welfare centres, etc) is concerned can reach all of the possible beneficiaries intended by the social assistance scheme.

Non-take-up can also be reduced at the societal level. Introducing online benefit applications and automated assessment may lead to lower levels of non-take-up. For this, improved access to the internet across countries is needed. At the same time, multiple channels for claiming a benefit must be provided so as to ensure that people without access to the internet have the possibility of claiming a benefit.

1.1.4 Conclusion about the dissemination of information and non-take-up

It seems clear that social assistance schemes can and will miss their objective of reducing poverty and exclusion when information about these schemes hasn't been disseminated. If an individual is unaware of the assistance or his or her entitlement to it, if one doesn't understand the application procedure, has a fear of stigmatization or there are negative attitudes towards beneficiaries from society, then non-take up will happen. It is therefore crucial that information is disseminated across all target groups.

At the administrative level, social assistance schemes have to be designed in order that they are easy to understand and are easily able to be communicated to the public. Complex application procedures need to be avoided and procedures need to be accessible and transparent.

1.2 Improving the perception of people in need: taking away stigmatization and tackling the threshold fear

People living in poverty are often looked down upon and cast aside by and within society just because of the fact that they are poor. A sub-class of people exists in society, sometimes created just by the fact that they are born into poverty or because of the fact that thy suffer a misfortune during the course of their lives. The stigma of being labelled as "*poor*" can also go hand in hand with being negatively marked as a beneficiary of social assistance and social assistance services. It damages a person's reputation and undermines their dignity.

This stigma can act as a barrier to accessing the social services that are provided by Governments, NGO's and other organisations. It creates and emphasises an experience of degradation and rejection by society. In doing so, it thus creates a *threshold of fear* for beneficiaries to go to welfare centres or other organisations which provide social assistance and social assistance services. According to Spicker and other sociologists, the imposition of such a stigma is one of the commonest forms of violence used in democratic societies.[42]

When tackling stigma, Inglis states that it is important to recognise the different forms it takes and how it operates at the various institutional, social and individual levels[43].

1.2.1 Problems created at an institutional level concerning the perception of people with a need

At the institutional level, one can find evidence of stigma in laws, policies and institutional practices that intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against, or shame people in need. A study in the United Kingdom documented the institutionalisation of stigma of beneficiaries of social assistance as follows[44]:

> *The public confession of failure; the presumption of guilt; the standing in line; the jumping through hoops; the repeated filling in of forms; the intrusion into their personal life; the sometimes poor-quality of service; the sense of being dehumanised and treated merely as a number.*

Similar examples can be found in other countries. Naming Dibao beneficiaries on public noticeboards in China can be considered one of them: public confession of possible failure or guilt as well as the intrusion into one's public and private lives. Such experiences can add to shame and further undermine self-esteem and self-confidence and thereby arguably lessen the chances of people escaping poverty or even asking for the social assistance that they need and that the country is providing.

The framing of a policy is also an important feature because it provides the lens that defines the policy problem to be solved and the tenor of the public and private debate that creates the environment in which the policy is embedded and delivered.

E.g.: a policy concerning the provision of housing for the homeless can be viewed differently if one talks to the target group as for example beggars that we need to get out of our streets or people without a place to stay that need a roof above their head in the first step to being reintegrated into society. Both have the same intended policies: providing shelter and housing, though both have a different perception or starting point for the target group in mind.

In the United Kingdom, there is a close linkage between this political framing discourse, and public opinion that reflects the shared values and shapes personal behaviour, as stated by Walker and Chase. This correspondence is reflected, mediated and perhaps even facilitated by the popular press (see Figure below).

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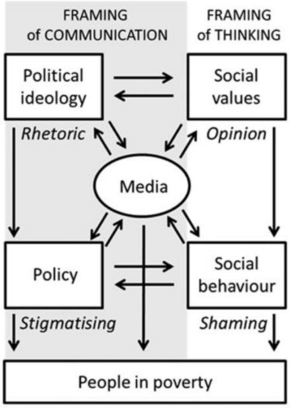
[42] Spicker (2011), Stigma and Social Welfare, http://www.spicker.uk/books/Paul%20Spicker%20-%20Stigma%20and%20Social%20Welfare.pdf
[43] Greig Inglis; The stigma of poverty, https://povertyalliance.wordpress.com/2016/10/19/the-stigma-of-poverty/
[44] Robert Walker & Elaine Chase, Adding to the shame of poverty: the public, politicians and the media, http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-adding-to-the-shame-of-poverty-Jul14.pdf

Figure 3: Framing and Shaming. Adding to the shame of poverty: the public, politicians and the media. [45].



People's opinions can be affected by reading negative stories in newspapers and moreover, that once changed, their new opinions become self-sustaining. Ideas such as that people living in poverty are taking advantage of the Government, are involved in fraudulent activities, are unwilling to work, etc, can take root and are hard to get rid of. These ideas can thus gravely harm such a precarious group of people following their condemnation in the media.

However, Walker and Chase found evidence stating the opposite in other countries. In Norway, where social solidarity and universal policies have pushed poverty to the margins of society and the public consciousness, poverty is used as a vehicle to criticise the inadequacies of policy in a press that serves as a noticeboard for individual and group opinion. It helps to shake up policy makers, change laws and adapt practices where necessary.

Institutional stigma can, from this perspective, be seen as how poverty is framed and discussed through the media. Negative stereotypes of beneficiaries are often perpetuated through media outlets[46]. The use of specific wording and framing can have a powerful effect on how public opinion is created through the media.

Despite the different roles that the media can play, be it positive or negative, the stigmatization of the assistance seekers is not only restricted to the public discourse, but is also present in private conversations and actual behaviour. These conversations and behaviours are harder to evaluate and where needed, to adjust. Social stigma includes public attitudes towards poverty and welfare and are typically measured through national surveys. Public attitudes towards welfare are complicated and vary considerably across the different forms of benefits, although one area where negative attitudes are particularly common is unemployment.

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[45] Robert Walker & Elaine Chase, Adding to the shame of poverty: the public, politicians and the media, http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-adding-to-the-shame-of-poverty-Jul14.pdf

[46] Baumberg, B., Bell, K., & Gaffney, D. (2012). Benefits stigma in Britain. Canterbury: Turn2us

1.2.2 Issues that need to be addressed regarding stigmatization

Recognising the various forms that stigma takes draws attention to the importance of developing anti-stigma campaigns that challenge prejudice and discrimination across the various institutional, social and personal levels. Interventions that focus exclusively on one form of stigma within a particular context may produce positive results in the short term, but these gains are unlikely to be maintained if the wider structural and social contexts remain unchanged.

It is also important to recognise that **power** is central to stigma, and that stigma can only occur when individuals have sufficient economic, social and/or political resources to effectively label, stereotype and discriminate against others. One person alone will not be able to make changes to the opinions of others, but when he or she is given a voice on an economic, political or social platform; one can sow the seeds for change. Governments, VIPs etc. can play an important role in these campaigns.

The actions don't have to intervene on all levels but can target a specific form of stigmatization.

1.3 A few European good practices

Belgium

In the context of 2010, the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Belgian Government organized in cooperation with all the local Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs) a large-scale coordinated action aimed at the general public to raise awareness about structural poverty and social exclusion. The campaign intended to emphasize the emancipatory role of the PCSWs.

The centres, which are the local contact point with the general public, united nationally in order to send out a strong message to all. The campaign was not exclusively focused on the employees and beneficiaries of social assistance and social assistance services but directed at the general public. In this way they tried to create broad public support in respect of public opinion for the policy measures aimed at the fight against child poverty, the fight against homelessness and creating support for a European minimum income. The united Centres for Social Welfare firmly anchored this campaign in their own organisations for which they got support from the Central Government.

The central message was *'Together against poverty. ME TOO'*. This emphasized that poverty is not a marginal fact. **It can happen to anyone**. And it can happen faster than people think. These centres are always there and are committed to helping people in poverty realize their dreams, develop their talents and integrate them optimally into society.

The message was incorporated in a central website, badges, posters and publicity campaigns in buses, trams and trains.

Figure 4: Badge "Together against Poverty. ME TOO"

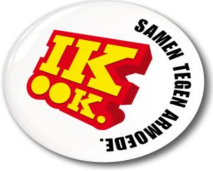

IK OOK.
SAMEN TEGEN ARMOEDE.

Figure 5: Miss Belgium Beauty 2010 who was a central figure in the campaign to fight against poverty

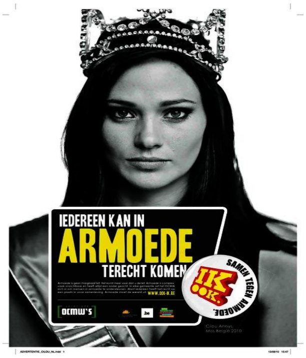
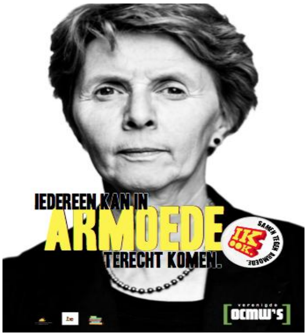

IEDEREEN KAN IN
ARMOEDE
TERECHT KOMEN
ocmw's
IK OOK.
SAMEN TEGEN ARMOEDE.

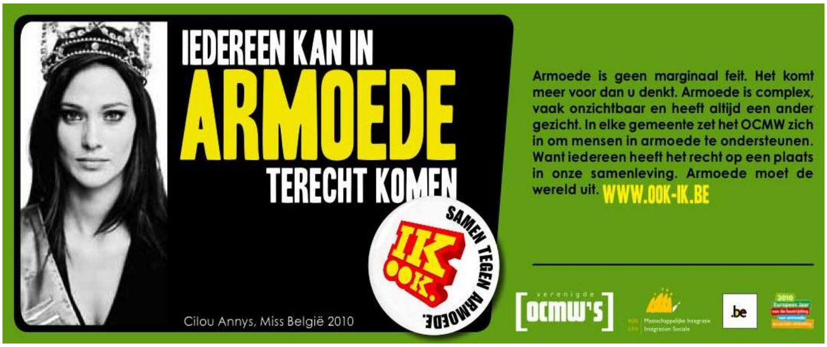
Figure 6: A random employee from the PCSW giving her face to the campaign via the central website


IEDEREEN KAN IN
ARMOEDE
TERECHT KOMEN.
IK OOK.
SAMEN TEGEN ARMOEDE.
verenigde
ocmw's

Employees of the centre were asked to wear the badge every day in the run-up to the campaign, but preferably in September and October leading up to 17th October, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty as recognized by the United Nations.

At the same time as the badge and the media event in the autumn of 2010 was being conducted, the Ministry for Social Integration and the Fight Against Poverty launched the digital part of the campaign: a separate website and activities on Social Media (Facebook & Twitter). The website offered, amongst other things, the possibility to download graphic material by the organizers: posters, programs, leaflets, a scenario on how to organize events concerning poverty, as well as to conduct an overview of all local activities from all the municipalities. After the launch of the campaign, an extra message was brought out **"Everyone can get out of poverty. You too. "**

Figure 7: Campaign shot from local buses and trams with Miss Belgian Beauty


IEDEREEN KAN IN
ARMOEDE
TERECHT KOMEN
Armoede is geen marginaal feit. Het komt meer voor dan u denkt. Armoede is complex, vaak onzichtbaar en heeft altijd een ander gezicht. In elke gemeente zet het OCMW zich in om mensen in armoede te ondersteunen. Want iedereen heeft het recht op een plaats in onze samenleving. Armoede moet de wereld uit.
WWW.OOK-IK.BE
SAMEN TEGEN ARMOEDE
IK OOK.
Cilou Annys, Miss België 2010
verenigde
ocmw's
.be

Message in Figure 7: *"Poverty is not a marginal fact. It is more common than you think. Poverty is complex, often invisible and always has a different face. The PCSW is committed to supporting people in poverty in every municipality. Because everyone has the right to a place in our society. Poverty has to be out of the world."*

United Kingdom

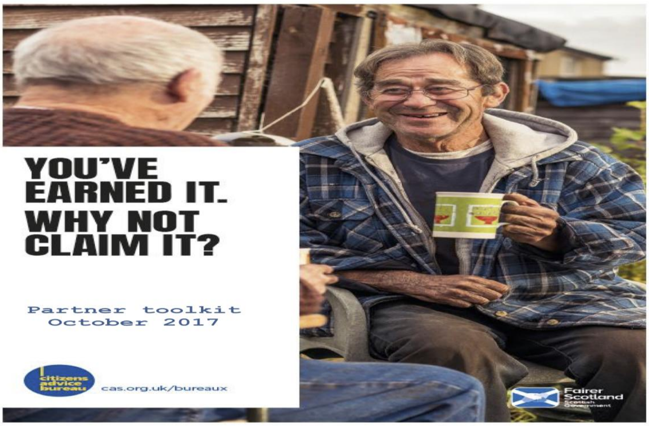
The Scottish Government has spent £300 000 on media campaigns, including radio, TV, press and social media, in order to reduce the stigma associated with and increasing the take-up of social benefits. The campaigns are targeted at both the general public and at specific target groups. The Scottish Government introduced an inclusive approach on designing the benefits, as people who have previously received benefits were included in the process.

For designing the benefits, different target groups were involved. For example, for designing the Young Carer's allowance, young people were involved. Here, special emphasis is placed on the fact that the information provided should be understandable by young people.

Messages on social media redirected the people directly towards a website where they could find out more information on place where they could claim a benefit.

- *'You've earned it. Why not claim it? Ask what benefits you may be entitled to. 0800 0232581 https://goo.gl/SwhWx8 #youveearnedit'*
- *'You give so much. So don't be embarrassed to ask for financial help if you need it. 0800 023 2581 https://goo.gl/SwhWx8 #youveearnedit'*
-

Figure 8: Poster for the Partner Toolkit designed by the Scottish government to encourage people to claim a benefit

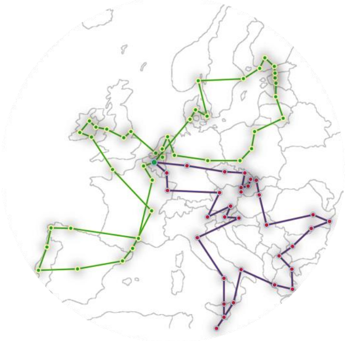

YOU'VE EARNED IT.
WHY NOT CLAIM IT?
Partner toolkit
October 2017
citizens advice bureau
cas.org.uk/bureaux
Fairer Scotland
Scottish Government

More information can be found on the website of the Scottish Government: https://beta.gov.scot/publications/social-security-partner-toolkit-youve-earned-it-campaign/

European Union working together through EMIN

In 2018 the European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) launched a campaign to build awareness amongst the whole of society of the importance of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes (MIS). To accomplish its mission, it used 2 buses, travelling around 32 countries (EU and non-EU) over 64 days, with over 120 programmes and over 1000 volunteers.

Figure 9: Bus route for the 2 EMIN buses both starting and ending their routes in Brussels



The road trip was designed to spread a message along its European route that income support schemes that are easily accessible, available to everybody who needs them, for as long as they need them, are adequate enough to live a life in dignity and to fully participate in society and are adapted to the cost of living in every European country.

Figure 10: Picture from a stop during the EMIN bus route campaigning for a European minimum income

GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME
NOBODY DESERVES LESS
SIGN UP HERE
WILL-KÜR
ALTERS ARMUT
HOHE MIETEN

Figure 11: One of the two busses from EMIN with messages from people written on it during the road trip

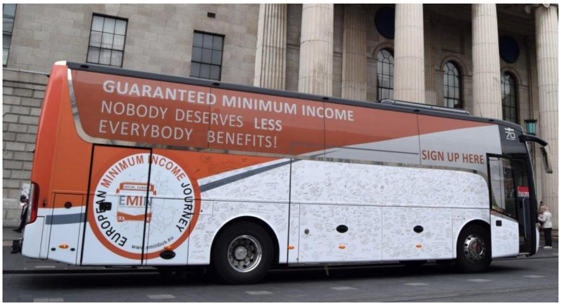

GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME
NOBODY DESERVES LESS
EVERYBODY BENEFITS!
SIGN UP HERE
EUROPEAN MINIMUM INCOME JOURNEY
EMIN
www.eminbus.eu

Figure 12: Person adding his personal message to the EMIN bus)

Figure 13: Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for employment social affairs skills and labour mobility, launching the EMIN Bus tour in the heart of the European Union Centre

Marianne Thyssen

The 2 busses have several stops in all the countries, where events and activities were organised by the National EMIN Networks. This bus tour was part of a bigger project, organised by the European Minimum Income Network designed to ensure the visibility of minimum income schemes and their role to enabling people to participate in society and in the labour market, acting as stabilisers in society. Other activities complementing the tour are being organised: seminars, peer reviews, … on related topics such as non-take-up, reference budgets and active inclusion. More information on the Bus tour can be found at www.eminbus.eu.

1.4 Nudging people in the “right” direction by better framing choices and information

The concept of ‘*nudging*’ is based on the book "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*"[47] by Richard Thaler who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2017 for his contributions to behavioural economics. Nudging is best described as a way to help people make choices by giving them a little *push* or nudge in the *right* direction **without** restricting their liberties.

Nudge theory uses the idea that small adaptations of the choices that are presented, can help steer them towards decisions that will benefit them. As Thaler and Sunstein put it: ‘*any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives’*.[48]

The behavioural economics that underline nudging are derived from the questioning of a rational agent model and its assumptions of complete rationality regarding the human decision-making processes. The decisions are deeply influenced by the context in which they are made. Therefore, in certain situations, people can benefit from nudges to make decisions that are more in line with their interests and needs. [49]

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[47] Thaler and Sunstein, Nudge, 2013, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwiD-biDgrDcAhUMaVAKHVJ0A1YQFghXMAI&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchgate.net%2Ffile.PostFileLoader.html%3Fid%3D53abe564cf57d7df1e8b45f4%26assetKey%3DAS%253A273548994646025%25401442230571326&usg=AOvVaw0OVZrtfncCZFESGbBqixH4

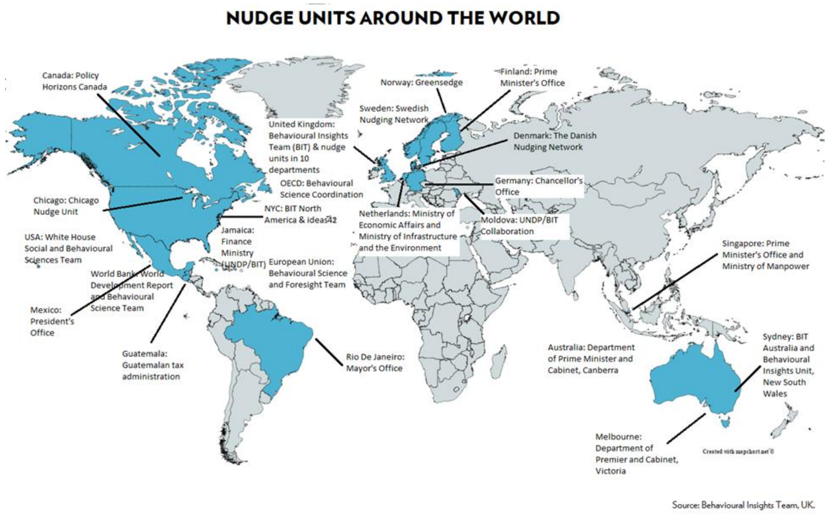
[48] Thaler and Sunstein, Nudge, 2013, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwiD-biDgrDcAhUMaVAKHVJ0A1YQFghXMAI&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchgate.net%2Ffile.PostFileLoader.html%3Fid%3D53abe564cf57d7df1e8b45f4%26assetKey%3DAS%253A273548994646025%25401442230571326&usg=AOvVaw0OVZrtfncCZFESGbBqixH4

The way in which choices are presented can have a significant impact. Policy makers must be informed when creating policies and schemes by evidence from behavioural sciences, about how people act and make decisions. Small changes in the framing of a message or choice, or in the structuring of a process, can have a significant impact on possible decisions and actions.

But, nudging is not easy. Behaviour experts are not just end-stage choice architects. They need to be analysers and knowledge brokers. Therefore, information about the end-users, their living conditions, their needs, etc., is crucial. The key feature is to understand how people behave in practice so that policy makers can design policy, programs and services better.

Several countries around the world started putting up Behavioural Insight Units following the British example in 2010 to apply the insights in different national policies. Other international institutions such as the World Bank, UN agencies, OECD, and EU soon followed and established behavioural insights units to support their programs.

Figure 14: map of nudging units around the world identified by the Behavioral Insights Team, UK[50]


NUDGE UNITS AROUND THE WORLD
Canada: Policy Horizons Canada
Norway: Greensedge
Finland: Prime Minister's Office
Sweden: Swedish Nudging Network
United Kingdom: Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) & nudge units in 10 departments
Denmark: The Danish Nudging Network
OECD: Behavioural Science Coordination
Germany: Chancellor's Office
Chicago: Chicago Nudge Unit
NYC: BIT North America & ideas42
Netherlands: Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment
Moldova: UNDP/BIT Collaboration
USA: White House Social and Behavioural Sciences Team
Jamaica: Finance Ministry (UNDP/BIT)
European Union: Behavioural Science and Foresight Team
Singapore: Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Manpower
World Bank: World Development Report and Behavioural Science Team
Mexico: President's Office
Guatemala: Guatemalan tax administration
Rio De Janeiro: Mayor's Office
Australia: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra
Sydney: BIT Australia and Behavioural Insights Unit, New South Wales
Melbourne: Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria
Created with mapchart.net ©

Source: Behavioural Insights Team, UK.

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[49] Thaler and Sunstein, Nudge, 2013, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwiD-biDgrDcAhUMaVAKHVJ0A1YQFghXMAI&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchgate.net%2Ffile.PostFileLoader.html%3Fid%3D53abe564cf57d7df1e8b45f4%26assetKey%3DAS%253A273548994646025%25401442230571326&usg=AOvVaw0OVZrtfncCZFESGbBqixH4

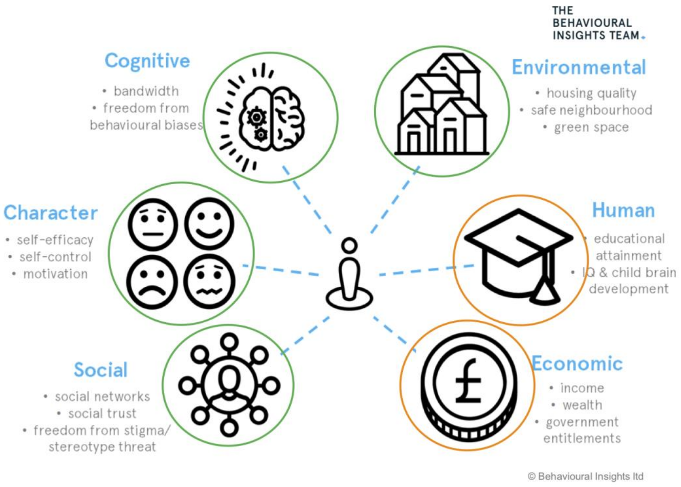
[50] https://www.monkprayogshala.in/blog/2016/9/19/a-world-of-nudges

1.4.1 Nudging and information dissemination regarding social assistance

Nudging can be looked at as an extension of traditional poverty reduction policies. When thinking of policies for social assistance and social assistance services, we want to disseminate information to the public in order to get them to ask for the help they need and to provide them with the aid that is being provided for them. In this the underlining assumptions is that the best-informed individual, or at least when one informs them, will make rational choices.

People in poverty are often confronted with situations in which they have to make hard and difficult choices based on their scarce means: money and time. For example, choosing between spending time making an appointment for social assistance or spending this time looking for work. This puts pressure on both the time and the cognitive load needed for all kinds of daily tasks they need to execute. Scholars state that poverty is a context in which people experience financial scarcity, as a result of which they have less bandwidth and executive functions (planning, overview, decision processes and adjusting their own emotions and behaviour) work less well. This in turn can lead to a greater tendency to errors of thinking and less sense of grip and control. In this way they get trapped in a vicious circle where their problem-solving capacity to come out of that circle is limited by scarcity and stress, which negatively influence decisions and behaviour. [51]

Figure 15: Types of capital resources effected by of poverty[52]


THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM.
Cognitive
• bandwidth
• freedom from behavioural biases
Environmental
• housing quality
• safe neighbourhood
• green space
Character
• self-efficacy
• self-control
• motivation
Human
• educational attainment
• IQ & child brain development
Social
• social networks
• social trust
• freedom from stigma/ stereotype threat
Economic
• income
• wealth
• government entitlements
© Behavioural Insights ltd

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[51] Shah, Mullainathan, Shafir, 2012, Some consequences of having too little.

[52] Joanne Reinhard, Armoede en beslissingen maken : Empowerment met inzet van inzichten uit de gedragsleer, 2016, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwij5p3xubjcAhWFmbQKHXezCPAQFggtMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hva.nl%2Fbinaries%2Fcontent%2Fassets%2Fsubsites%2Fkc-mr%2Fevenementen-bijlagen%2F2016%2Fambitie-loont-10112016%2Fpresentaties%2F2.-joanne-reinhard---senior-adviseur-gedragsbeinvloeding.pdf%3F1482059784763&usg=AOvVaw2QpUh3xe_BUctRp4M6WGvC

Nudging in this point of view can be seen as an extension of the toolbox that every (level of) government has to achieve as a certain goal. A classic government toolbox exists out of **sermons**: communicating about what people should do to get help, **carrots**: the means to convince people to ask for help such as subsidies and **sticks**: the legal (repressive) instruments that tell people what can and cannot be done. Nudges are other engineered ways to get people to do something that they wouldn't have done without an extra motivation.[53]

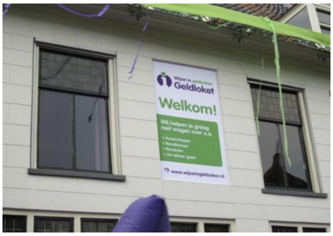
Table 1: Nudging: a new instrument for policy design by the Flemish Government[54]

	Means for Governments		**Position of the Governments**
Education	Sermons	Communicative instruments	Centre of information and knowledge
Engineering	Nudges	Behavioural instruments	Liberal Pater/Mater
	Carrots	Economic instruments	Financial capacity to create barriers and drivers
Enforcement	Sticks	Legal instruments	Authority to point out what can and can't happen

Nudges are thus extensions of the engineered carrots that play on the behaviour of a person and complement the economic instruments or carrots that are used to convince people and steer them in a certain direction.

1.4.2 A couple of European nudging examples

Figure 16: Nudging in The Netherlands: Geldloket [55]



The depiction in number 14 welcomes people to come into an office called "Geldloket". The text states: *"Your help for money affair. The money window. Welcome. We are glad to help*

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[53] Wouter van Acker, Nudging as a new policy instrument, 2017, https://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/nudging_as_a_new_policy_instrument_-_w._van_acker_1.pdf

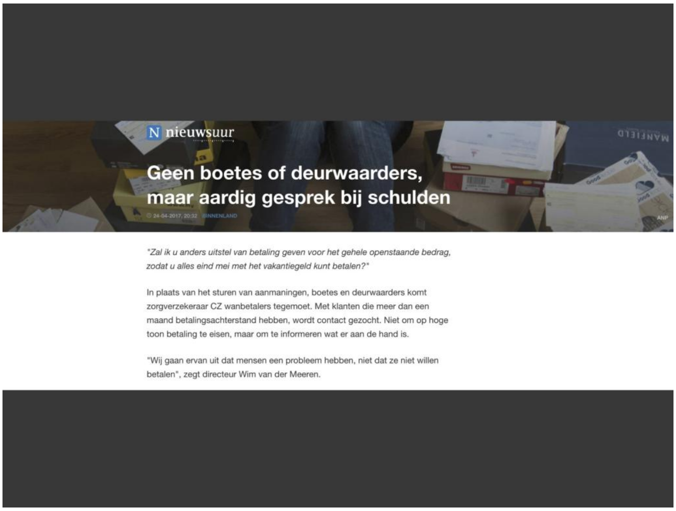
[54] Wout van Acker, Nudging als nieuw beleidsinstrument, 2016, https://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/nudging_as_a_new_policy_instrument_-_w._van_acker_1.pdf

[55] Joram Feitsma, Nudge in the Netherlands, https://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/nudge_in_the_netherlands_-_j._feitsma_0.pdf

you with questions about: renting and buying a place to live, how to make ends meet on a tight budget, your retirement, divorce issues, more information on www.wijzeringeldzaken.nl".

Instead of just listing a number of issues which you can go and ask. They emphasise the fact that they are there to help you with any issues you can have regarding a certain number of subject matters.

Figure 17: No tickets or debt collectors, but a nice chat about debts



N nieuwsuur

Geen boetes of deurwaarders, maar aardig gesprek bij schulden

24-04-2017, 20:32 BINNENLAND

ANP

"Zal ik u anders uitstel van betaling geven voor het gehele openstaande bedrag, zodat u alles eind mei met het vakantiegeld kunt betalen?"

In plaats van het sturen van aanmaningen, boetes en deurwaarders komt zorgverzekeraar CZ wanbetalers tegemoet. Met klanten die meer dan een maand betalingsachterstand hebben, wordt contact gezocht. Niet om op hoge toon betaling te eisen, maar om te informeren wat er aan de hand is.

"Wij gaan ervan uit dat mensen een probleem hebben, niet dat ze niet willen betalen", zegt directeur Wim van der Meeren.

The image entitled "*No tickets or debt collectors, but a nice chat about debts*" from a Dutch news agency called Nieuwsuur shows how a Dutch national health insurance company uses gentle nudging to ask citizens to help them pay their outstanding debts. The first paragraph states "*Shall we grant you an extension for the whole amount of your outstanding bills in order that you can pay us back next month with your annual leave bonus?*" The tone of the message is not to inform them of the high of the outstanding debt and to demand to pay the bills urgently. The agency rather informs them of the outstanding money and asks them to come by or call if there is any other issue preventing them to pay, in order to come to a mutual agreement.

Other examples and recommendations can be found in the extensive report made by the behavioural insight team: "Poverty and decision-making. How behavioural science can improve opportunity in the UK".[56]

1.5 Tapping into unexpected information sources: getting help from experts by experience

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[56] Kizzy Gandy, Katy King, Pippa Streeter Hurle, Chloe Bustin and Kate Glazebrook, 2016, Poverty and decision-making. How behavioral science can improve opportunity in the UK, http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/JRF-poverty-and-decision-making.pdf

The Belgian ministry for Social Integration and Fight against Poverty (www.mi-is.be) tapped into what looked at first sight a very surprising and unexpected source of information: the potential use of information and aid provided by beneficiaries who had benefited from social assistance and experienced poverty first-hand. With their personal perspective from being at the receiving end of social assistance and social assistance services, as well as experienced different forms of poverty, these experts by experience gave birth to a new and by the government officially recognised occupation. This new function was defined as a role in the public service in order to help improve upon its services and accessibility[57].

In order to take up this new role, the selected individuals were given specific training for three years prior to their entry into the public service. With the aid of mentors and coaches they trained to develop their skills. The experts by experience were afterward placed in various government administrations to help them to develop or improve services that can better comprehend the needs, specificities and the expectations of the public that was the target group for the specific ministry.

By embedding experts by experience into administrative offices at first at the national level and later at local levels, which both develop and implement policies, it allowed to shed new light on problems, faults, errors and/or difficulties in administrative processes, as their experience and training allowed them to observe what changes from the inside might better support people living in poverty and potential beneficiaries.

With both the government and the ex-social assistance beneficiaries working together, it helped to build a better social assistance and address the gaps in the system that separated the poor from other people in society. These are: [58] [59] [60]

- **Structural gap**: a discrepancy in the satisfaction of realizing guaranteed fundamental social rights amongst people living in poverty, due to structural infrastructure
- **Participation gap**: exclusion from participation in society, where economic dependence is a driving factor
- **Feeling gap**: psychological and social traumas which end up marking the individual, on a deep level, and can create major obstacles to accessing or mobilizing any aids that may be available
- **Knowledge gap:** limited knowledge of how society functions, particularly administrative regulations; unknowingness of their eligibility for a program or service and how to seek out this information; service providers not realizing that the individual does not understand things that seem to be obvious
- **Aptitude gap:** experiences leading up to lack of aptitudes such as social, learning, emotional or management skills required for participation in society.

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[57] Marie-Th r se Casman, an ranken, Dani lle Dierckx, Dimitri Deflandre & Geert Campaert, Experts by Experience in poverty and social exclusion, nnovation Players in the Belgian Federal Public Services, http://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/goede_praktijkenboek_engels_def.pdf

[58] Marie-Th r se Casman, an ranken, Dani lle Dierckx, Dimitri Deflandre & Geert Campaert, Experts by Experience in poverty and social exclusion, nnovation Players in the Belgian Federal Public Services, http://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/goede_praktijkenboek_engels_def.pdf

Poverty in Belgium, 2010, https://www.mi-is.be/sites/default/files/documents/poverty_in_belgium_-_8114_-_06-10-2010_-_binnenwerk.pdf

How 'experts by experience in poverty and social exclusion' improve access and the quality of public services in Belgium, http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/co-production-with-experts-by-experience-in-poverty-and-social-exclusion-in-belgium/

To help bridge these gaps, the experts received specific assignments within the different organisations that employed them. These tasks can vary but include:

- Contribute to the improvement of the reception and the dissemination of the information to the general public, in particular with a very special attention to the poor.
- Helping beneficiaries to go through sometimes very complex administrative procedures.
- Identify the needs and requirements of people in poverty through interviews, surveys, personal and direct contact with social organizations as well as NGO's.
- Improve the overall quality and accessibility of the services by making proposals for improving communication, procedures and policies.
- Contribute to the development of joint ventures and collaboration between organisations, ministries, NGO's, …, so that their expertise can also be used across these organisations. In this way, their transversal objective of the fight against poverty is strengthened locally as well as nationally.
- Identify structural problems, legal weaknesses, and unprecedented and untapped needs of people in poverty.

The project was presented at the 7th European Quality Conference hosted in Vilnius where EU experts discussed on how to improve public administration. The conference covered the strengthening of civil service, the improvement of service quality and the activities of public administration institutions as well as the implementation of Open Government initiatives. A film was produced afterwards, available only in Flemish and French, to showcase the work of the experts across the country (https://www.mi-is.be/fr/presse-multimedia/experts-du-vecu-le-film).

At the moment there are 23 experts by experience employed in 12 Belgian departments: Selot (government selection agency), Ministry for Economy, the public institution for social security (HZIV), Social Security of Self-employed Entrepreneurs (NISSE), The Ministry for Justice, Ministry for Social Integration and Fight Against Poverty, Ministry for Social Security, Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS), Ministry for Health, Ministry for Finance, the National Employment Office (NEO) and another 16 experts are employed in making health care more accessible.

2. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION FOR AND BY BENEFICIAIRES, SOCIAL WORKERS AND POLICY MAKERS ALIKE

The following paragraphs examine the information dissemination for and by beneficiaries, social workers and policy executioners or policy makers on all government levels. In addition to the theory from the previous chapter, additional examples from European practices will be provided.

2.1 Information dissemination for beneficiaries

As stated, information on social assistance and social services needs to be as clear and comprehensible as possible as well as to be suited to the beneficiary's own situation. It has to provide them with answers in order to deal with a possible knowledge gap in with a sometimes-limited knowledge of how society functions, the particularly administrative regulations, the unknowingness of their eligibility and how to seek out this information can be challenging for beneficiaries to find the social assistance and services they need.

In addition to this, service providers such as NGO's, welfare centres or other organizations, willing to help but not realizing that the possible beneficiary cannot understand parts or sometimes the whole information, would also hinder further help.

In order to bridge this gap, one can invest in tailoring, targeting – or marketing – and writing narratives to and for the individual in order to make the possible beneficiaries relate to the social assistance system. A special attention has to be given to the level of comprehension related to their level of education and (il)literacy. A couple of examples of questions for which answers need to be provided for from a beneficiary points of view:

- What kind of social assistance, social services or other help can I get?
- Where can I go to get the social assistance, social services or other help?
- What are the conditions to be able to apply for help?
- What is expected from me as a beneficiary when applying (e.g. documents)?
- What is expected from me as a beneficiary in the system to provide information?
- What do I need to do to get social assistance, social services or other help?
- Which official people, such as social workers can I talk to (online or offline) about social assistance and services?
- Where can I find other people who are willing to share their experience about the help they received?

Most of these questions are straight-forward, appear to be easy to answer at first sight and revolve around practical information: *what*, *how* and *where*. Answering can be challenging. Take for example the question "*Where can I go to get the social assistance, social services or other help?*" A possible and simple answer can be "*Go to your nearest local NGO (named "X"), social welfare centre, for further help*." This answer can imply more questions such as *"Where is the nearest centre?", "How can I get to this centre? By bus? By Tram?", "How much will it cost me to get there?", "Can I get a reduction for my travel expenses?", "When are the opening hours?", "Can I bring my children with me and can I leave them there in a creche when I go through with the enquiry?" ...*

Disseminating information related to these and other questions will help not only beneficiaries get aid they are entitled to, but can also relieve some of the workload of social workers and other care givers when dealing with well-informed help-seekers.

2.1.1 Information dissemination via a multi-channel approach

Providing answers to these and other questions as well as dissemination of other useful information can be done through online media (social media, websites, WeChat) and offline media (leaflets, brochures, posters). Both medias can reinforce one another when both are referencing each other for more information. E.g. leaflets can refer citizens to websites, social media, WeChat pages, etc. where supplementary information is available, questions can be asked via for example a chat box, online forms can be filled in, etc.

In addition to this, online social networks where other (possible) beneficiaries with similar interests frequent, can also be a means to spread and relay information, as in many cases can have the same effect as word-to-mouth dissemination can have.

2.1.2 Keeping digital inclusion in mind when disseminating and searching for information online

When disseminating information online, one has to keep in mind the certain aspects of digital in- and exclusion off poor groups in society. Research indicated that certain socio-economic weak groups lagged behind in terms of access to and use of these digital media. This phenomenon created existing social inequalities that exist between promising and underprivileged groups61.

European policymakers responded by providing access to digital media for as many people as possible. Traces of this can be found in the decision-making process of the European Commission, which specifically took a number of measures in its EU 2020 strategy to promote digital inclusion and to increase the internet access and digital skills of all Europeans[62] [63].

Providing access is a classic answer to problems identified by the digital divide of the first degree. Beneficiaries looking for information on social assistance and services have to get over the first hurdle. Gerard Valenduc[64] concludes, just like Van Dijk[65] that this uneven access is getting smaller and smaller, but that it is becoming more difficult for socially vulnerable groups to be bridged. More and more people are getting access to digital media, but income and education levels remain a decisive factor in the lagging behind in the digital divide of the first degree. It is important to note that this digital inequality cannot be reduced to just one factor, but a combination of interacting elements.

Once an individual breaks through the physical barrier of access to the digital media, the digital divide can be analysed in the light of a diversified use. This is indicated by the digital divide of the second degree[66]. Having the necessary knowledge to get started with it is the next step. It is not so much the access that is obstructive, but primarily the useful use of the technology and thus sufficient motivation to use the digital media. Van Dijk identified three types of skills: operational, informational and strategic skills that a person must have in order to be able to deal with digital media, but later expanded these skills even further with formal, content-creating and communication skills. An overview:

1. With operational skills, the authors summarize the knowledge that an individual must possess in order to be able to start using technology and software.
2. Formal skills continue to build on operational skills. In addition to the classical button knowledge, each medium also has specific formal characteristics in which each user has to adjust his functioning and conceptual framework.
3. Informational skills go a step further and indicates the ability to search for and process relevant information. Because of the large amount of information on the internet, a user must be able to separate this information.

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[61] Cammaerts et al, 2013, Beyond the Digital Divide. Reducing Exclusion, Fostering Inclusion.

[62] European Commission. (2010). Mededeling van de Commissie. Europa 2020–Een strategie. Geraadpleegd op 9 juli 2016 via http://www.lcoj.nl/eurodesk/JeugdbeleidinEuropa/Meer%20informatie/EU_2020_strategie_NL.pdf

[63] European Commission. (2002). COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION. Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue - General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission. Commission of the European Communities. Geraadpleegd op 9 juli 2016 via http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2002:0704:FIN:EN:PDF#_Toc46744741

[64] Lahaye, W., Pannecoucke, I., Vrancken, J., & Van Rossem, R. (2013). Armoede in België: Jaarboek 2013. Leuven: Acco.

[65] Van Dijk, J. (2005). The deepening divide: inequality in the information society. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

[66] De Coninck, J. (2015). E-Inclusie en Brusselse jongeren in maatschappelijk kwetsbare situaties: Onderzoek inzake de beleidsmaatregelen in een grootstedelijke context [Bachelor paper]. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

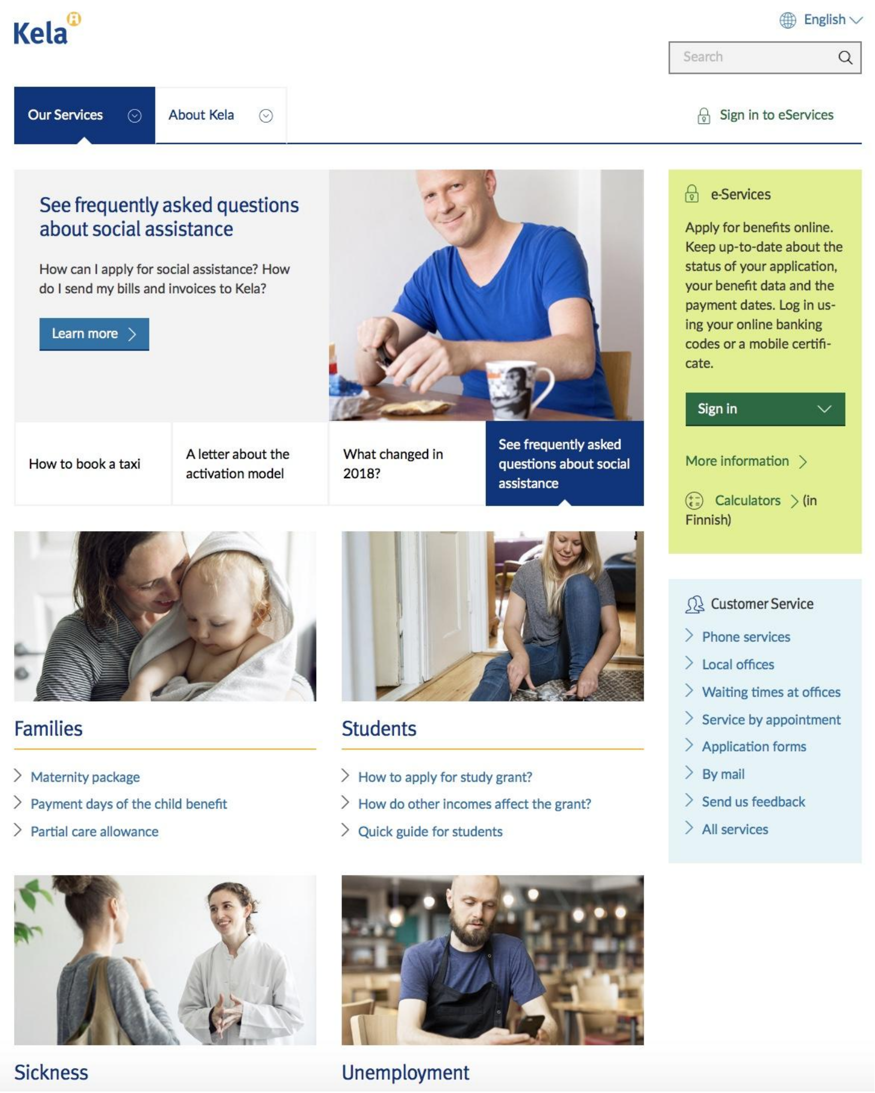
4. Communication skills have made a strong advance in recent years. Where we used to mail first social media such as Facebook and instant media such as Twitter, Snapchat, ...
5. Content-creating skills also became more important. Technology now also allows you to place information on the internet in a simple way. Videos, music, blogs, websites, ... without too difficult coding or too expensive devices.
6. Strategic skills indicate the ability to combine operational and informational skills to improve individual position.

When a person is looking for information online one has to keep in mind these different aspects of the digital divide. Access points for information can be part of a solution. Providing aid at this access point could greatly help the information accumulation of possible beneficiaries.

2.1.3 A Finnish example on information dissemination: "Kela" ("*Kansaneläkelaitos*")

Kela is the Finnish abbreviation for "*Kansaneläkelaitos*" which translates into The Social Insurance Institution. This government agency is in charge of settling benefits under its national social security programs. The office provides standardised information from a national level for local usage. Its website is a good example of client-oriented information dissemination. It puts all off the services a beneficiary can apply for, on the foreground.

Figure 18: Kela's Homepage ("Kansaneläkelaitos")


Kela
English
Search
Our Services
About Kela
Sign in to eServices

See frequently asked questions about social assistance

How can I apply for social assistance? How do I send my bills and invoices to Kela?

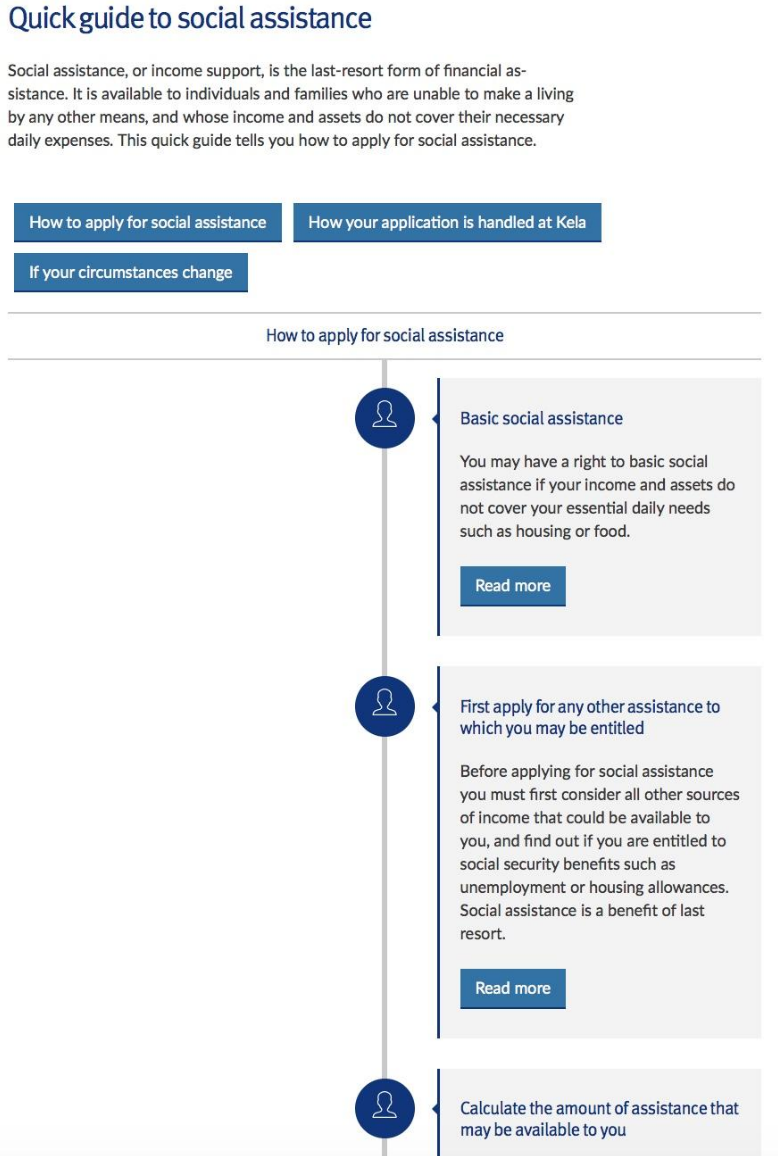
Learn more
How to book a taxi
A letter about the activation model
What changed in 2018?
See frequently asked questions about social assistance
e-Services

Apply for benefits online. Keep up-to-date about the status of your application, your benefit data and the payment dates. Log in using your online banking codes or a mobile certificate.

Sign in
More information
Calculators (in Finnish)
Customer Service
Phone services
Local offices
Waiting times at offices
Service by appointment
Application forms
By mail
Send us feedback
All services
Families
Maternity package
Payment days of the child benefit
Partial care allowance
Students
How to apply for study grant?
How do other incomes affect the grant?
Quick guide for students
Sickness
Unemployment

Regarding the social assistance, it breaks down the rule of law into little packages which are easy to understand and provide links to additional information on conditionality of social assistance (https://www.kela.fi/web/en/social-assistance-quick-guide).

Figure 19: KELA's quick guide to social assistance



Quick guide to social assistance

Social assistance, or income support, is the last-resort form of financial assistance. It is available to individuals and families who are unable to make a living by any other means, and whose income and assets do not cover their necessary daily expenses. This quick guide tells you how to apply for social assistance.

How to apply for social assistance
How your application is handled at Kela
If your circumstances change

How to apply for social assistance

Basic social assistance

You may have a right to basic social assistance if your income and assets do not cover your essential daily needs such as housing or food.

First apply for any other assistance to which you may be entitled

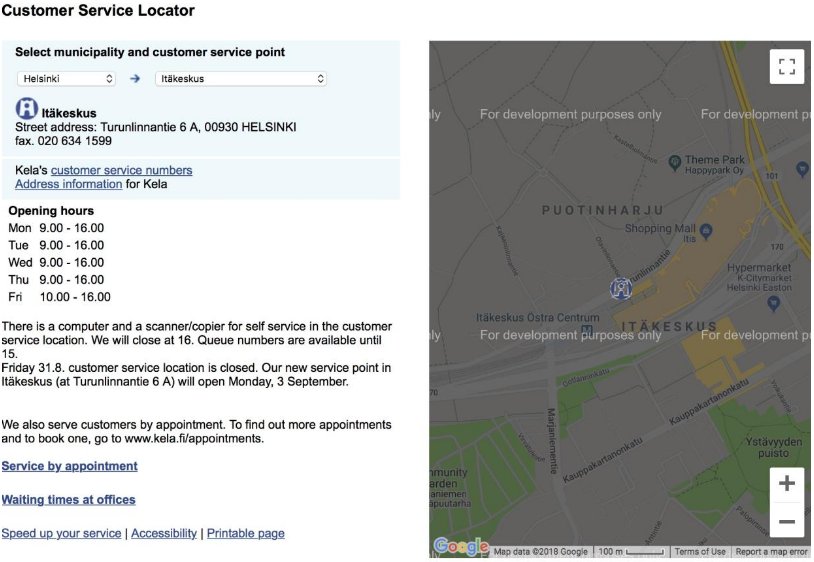
Before applying for social assistance you must first consider all other sources of income that could be available to you, and find out if you are entitled to social security benefits such as unemployment or housing allowances. Social assistance is a benefit of last resort.

Calculate the amount of assistance that may be available to you

KELA orients the citizens to local offices with the help of further practical information on how to make appointments online (https://www.kela.fi/web/en/appointments). Even information on the waiting lines at all the Kela offices are put online. These statuses of the waiting lines are updated every time a beneficiary is helped. (https://www.kela.fi/web/en/waitingtimes)

The location of the offices all over the country are well indicated via a map. (http://raportit.kela.fi/ibi_apps/WFServlet?IBIF_ex=palvelupistehaku&IBIAPP_app=palhaku&YKIELI=E)

Figure 20: Finnish KELO Customer Service locator with additional helpful information for the beneficiary



Customer Service Locator

Select municipality and customer service point

Helsinki → Itäkeskus

Itäkeskus
Street address: Turunlinnantie 6 A, 00930 HELSINKI
fax. 020 634 1599

Kela's customer service numbers
Address information for Kela

Opening hours

Mon	9.00 - 16.00
Tue	9.00 - 16.00
Wed	9.00 - 16.00
Thu	9.00 - 16.00
Fri	10.00 - 16.00

There is a computer and a scanner/copier for self service in the customer service location. We will close at 16. Queue numbers are available until 15.
Friday 31.8. customer service location is closed. Our new service point in Itäkeskus (at Turunlinnantie 6 A) will open Monday, 3 September.

We also serve customers by appointment. To find out more appointments and to book one, go to www.kela.fi/appointments.

Service by appointment

Waiting times at offices

Speed up your service | Accessibility | Printable page

For development purposes only
Theme Park
Happypark Oy
PUOTINHARJU
Shopping Mall
Itis
Hypermarket
K-Citymarket
Helsinki Easton
Itäkeskus Östra Centrum
ITÄKESKUS
Turunlinnantie
Marjaniementie
Kauppakartanonkatu
Ystävyyden puisto
Google
Map data ©2018 Google
100 m
Terms of Use
Report a map error

These Citizen Service Centres are operated jointly by Kela and other public-sector organizations. Beneficiaries can pick up claim forms or brochures, file claims for benefit, and receive general assistance on benefits and the use of Kela's online service. Since other organizations are also housed in the same building or area, services are more easily accessible and can be combined if necessary.

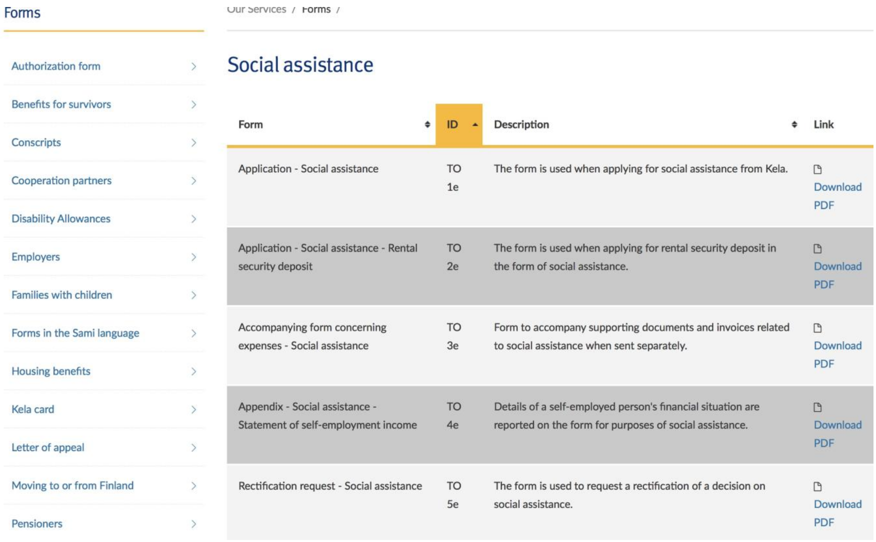
KELA also actively improves its services through asking for feedback. The forms are only for feedback. For personal matters, KELA directs the applications towards their online customer service, which allows them to transmit personal information safely and securely. (https://palaute.kela.fi/web/guest/palautelomake?lang=en#!Public%20Feedback%20Form)

Applicants can use the online forms at:

(https://www.kela.fi/web/en/forms?p_p_id=122_INSTANCE_c0wqNgMhYKlu&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-

1&p_p_col_count=1&p_r_p_564233524_resetCur=true&p_r_p_564233524_categoryId=9605517)

Figure 21: Overview of online forms used by applications via KELA.



Forms

- Authorization form
- Benefits for survivors
- Conscripts
- Cooperation partners
- Disability Allowances
- Employers
- Families with children
- Forms in the Sami language
- Housing benefits
- Kela card
- Letter of appeal
- Moving to or from Finland
- Pensioners

Our services / Forms /

Social assistance

Form	ID	Description	Link
Application - Social assistance	TO 1e	The form is used when applying for social assistance from Kela.	Download PDF
Application - Social assistance - Rental security deposit	TO 2e	The form is used when applying for rental security deposit in the form of social assistance.	Download PDF
Accompanying form concerning expenses - Social assistance	TO 3e	Form to accompany supporting documents and invoices related to social assistance when sent separately.	Download PDF
Appendix - Social assistance - Statement of self-employment income	TO 4e	Details of a self-employed person's financial situation are reported on the form for purposes of social assistance.	Download PDF
Rectification request - Social assistance	TO 5e	The form is used to request a rectification of a decision on social assistance.	Download PDF

KELA also provides information for applications via easily accessible and understandable leaflets and brochures. ([https://www.kela.fi/web/en/brochures)](https://www.kela.fi/web/en/brochures)

Figure 22: KELA brochures and leaflets op social assistance

How to apply for Kela benefits and send supporting documents online

Basic social assistance
Emergency financial assistance
Briefly and in plain language

Social assistance in brief

2.2 Information dissemination for social workers by policy makers

Social workers and first-line workers who have direct contact with beneficiaries of social assistance play a crucial role in conveying information and delivering the same services for all. To be able to help the people in need and provide quality social assistance and service, they all have to receive the same information. Standardization of practices is a key aspect of a unified social assistance scheme in order to provide the same service for all who are in need. Two similar cases are presented: Austria and Belgium.

2.2.1 A common European struggle: the Austrian's social assistance reform and Belgium's approach towards standardization of social assistance practices [67]

The Austrian Social Office and the Austrian municipalities are both responsible for providing social assistance to its citizens. Funding is provided by local and provincial administrations, though their share varied within the country from state to state. A key reason for the push for a reform as a whole was the non-standardised assistance provision: social assistance benefit rate differed in each region. In addition to this there was very little control over how much financial support was provided in the different states and the system left plenty of room for discretion in the treatment of the beneficiaries. This resulted in an unequal and unbalanced system. In addition to this, a sizable non-take-up rate also gave ground for concerns.

The Austrian government pushed forward to create a benefit system with standard rates, eligibility criteria, sanctioning and repayment regulations across all states. Legal complexity arising from the different rules applying in all regions was to be eliminated through the standardisation of rules.

A key aspect in the reform was the redefinition towards a single point-of-contact. This was meant to address many problems at the same time (mostly stigmatisation, weak link between social assistance and activation and the prevailing institutional complexities).

In order to supervise the reform, a committee was assigned with the task of monitoring the implementation. The committee was made of up of representatives of the Ministry and the Federal State, the regions, Social Security Institutions and NGOs, the Statistical Office of Austria and other experts in the field. Its responsibility was to provide recommendations on the implementation and further development as well as to carry out evaluation reports periodically.

The Belgian Ministry for Social Integration and Fight against Poverty also witnessed some discrepancies in practices on how social assistance was provided by the public social welfare centres. These centres can decide to organise these services themselves or to delegate the implementation to a third partner; though the centres always stay responsible for the coordination of the social services.

The Ministry found that on the one hand some of the instructions and procedure weren't clear enough to be put in practice and left room for interpretation. On the other hand, the Ministry found that depending on the civil servant who answered questions from social workers about interpretations of laws and practices, slight variations in the answers were given. This sometimes led to practices where social workers called around until they were given an answer that was most suited to the outcome they wanted to obtain.

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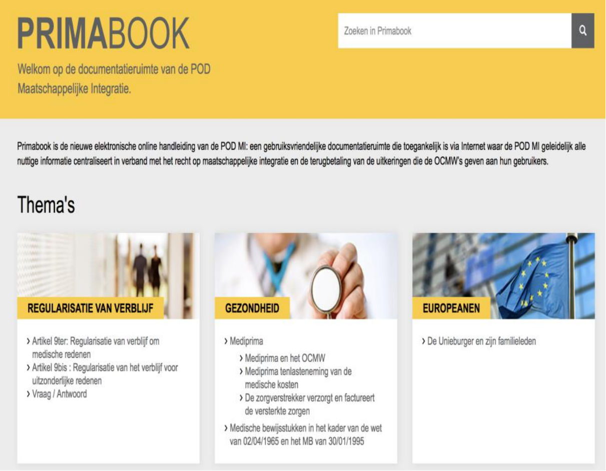
[67] https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwiUoKu8kaPdAhUMYVAKHa3_BmgQFjAAegQIABAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fsocial%2FBlobServlet%3FdocId%3D13785%26langId%3Den&usg=AOvVaw0ftpnXhz7UwiSEf-papRcv

Since the central mission of the centres is to organise the necessary services at local level to guarantee a life in dignity for every inhabitant of the municipality without distinction, a call to standardize the information flow and interpretation of the rule of law was necessary.

The Ministry centralised therefore all incoming questions in a new department called the Front Office where trained social workers answered calls and emails. The new department was not only created to help with interpretation of procedures and laws. Its secondary mission is to detect problems and make suggestions to top-level management on how to improve laws and practices. Since its launch, the Front Office answers 80% of all incoming inquiries and works together with the Legal Department for the remainder of the more complicated 20%.

To prevent an overflow of questions, a website named PrimaBook was designed to support the social workers on how to apply policies correctly and find their way in the maze of legislation. (http://primabook.mi-is.be) The website includes information about new laws on social assistance and related services, frequently asked questions and answers, good practices from several welfare centres.

Figure 23: Primabook homepage: providing information for social workers on social assistance services



Welkom op de documentatieruimte van de POD Maatschappelijke Integratie.

Primabook is de nieuwe elektronische online handleiding van de POD MI: een gebruiksvriendelijke documentatieruimte die toegankelijk is via Internet waar de POD MI geleidelijk alle nuttige informatie centraliseert in verband met het recht op maatschappelijke integratie en de terugbetaling van de uitkeringen die de OCMW's geven aan hun gebruikers.

Thema's

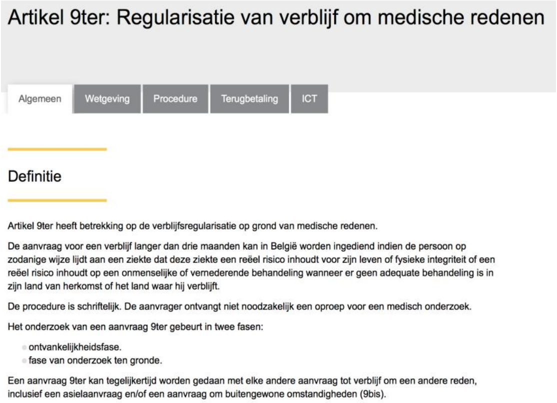
REGULARISATIE VAN VERBLIJF
- › Artikel 9ter: Regularisatie van verblijf om medische redenen
- › Artikel 9bis : Regularisatie van het verblijf voor uitzonderlijke redenen
- › Vraag / Antwoord

GEZONDHEID
- › Mediprima
  - › Mediprima en het OCMW
  - › Mediprima tenlasteneming van de medische kosten
  - › De zorgverstrekker verzorgt en factureert de versterkte zorgen
- › Medische bewijsstukken in het kader van de wet van 02/04/1965 en het MB van 30/01/1995

EUROPEANEN
- › De Unieburger en zijn familieleden

The information on PrimaBook is updated regularly by the social workers employed at the Front Office. Being able themselves to add to the available information and/or correct where necessary, allows for a quick information dissemination between the Ministry and the local welfare centres. Monitoring and quality checks are put in place through a direct link between the Front Office and the Communication Department as well as the Legal Department.

Figure 24: PrimaBook information sheet on "article 9T: regularization of residence based on medical necessity"



Artikel 9ter: Regularisatie van verblijf om medische redenen

Definitie

Artikel 9ter heeft betrekking op de verblijfsregularisatie op grond van medische redenen.

De aanvraag voor een verblijf langer dan drie maanden kan in België worden ingediend indien de persoon op zodanige wijze lijdt aan een ziekte dat deze ziekte een reëel risico inhoudt voor zijn leven of fysieke integriteit of een reëel risico inhoudt op een onmenselijke of vernederende behandeling wanneer er geen adequate behandeling is in zijn land van herkomst of het land waar hij verblijft.

De procedure is schriftelijk. De aanvrager ontvangt niet noodzakelijk een oproep voor een medisch onderzoek.

Het onderzoek van een aanvraag 9ter gebeurt in twee fasen:

- ontvankelijkheidsfase.
- fase van onderzoek ten gronde.

Een aanvraag 9ter kan tegelijkertijd worden gedaan met elke andere aanvraag tot verblijf om een andere reden, inclusief een asielaanvraag en/of een aanvraag om buitengewone omstandigheden (9bis).

Figure 23 shows a standard information sheet on the PrimaBook website. It includes information about the definition of the aid that is provided, links to all available legal documents and sources, procedures to follow for the social workers, how to ask for subsidies from the central government by the public welfare centres, instructions for ICT developers for database and record keeping, …

The Front Office is evaluated annually by the social workers and other colleagues from all 589 public welfare centres. The results from 2017 were:

- 89% satisfaction on Front Office answers
- 90% satisfaction on the speed of the responses
- 83% satisfaction on the quality of the responses
- 83% satisfaction on the clarity of procedures
- 93% satisfaction of expertise of Front Office workers

The top-level management of the Ministry continues to use these results and the feedback to improve social assistance services, policies, communication, but doesn’t rely on just one channel to improve overall policies. In addition to its communication policy which includes a traditional top-down approach towards policy and information dissemination (publishing the laws and regulations on the website and informing the centres via a monthly newsletters), the Ministry sends out it employees and experts twice a year to all 10 provinces to meet the centres’ presidents. The main purpose for these meetings is not only to convey information from the Ministry towards the local level, but to ask for input on policy changes, improvements and to exchange good practices between welfare centres.

3. DIFFERENT ROLES FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATED WITH INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

3.1. Local government welfare centres and other local organisations: closest positioned to the beneficiaries

Local welfare centres and other organisations that operated on this level can because of their closeness to their target groups, be one of the most important actor for combatting poverty, providing social assistance services and inform possible beneficiaries about the different forms of social assistance they can get. These organisations are most often responsible for implementing national, regional and provincial policies. Their locally embedded social policy can aim for maximum accessibility to services for every citizen.

Social workers who are most often employed here, are the ones that come in contact with the people such as first line workers do. They need to know where their possible beneficiaries can be found, what they can offer them as social assistance and social assistance services, and where they can go to find help. They have to know the legislation as well as the sector in which they work.

Reaching out to possible beneficiaries is important for social workers who may reach groups of people that otherwise might be harder to reach by conventional leaflets, brochures, TV- and or internet commercials.

4. CONCLUSION

The argument presented in this report is that a successful implementation of any social assistance scheme can be determined by how well on the one hand the aid and the related information reaches the target groups and on the other hand by how well the information helps the policy executioners to provide with ease the same standardize assistance for all.

Information dissemination towards possible beneficiaries can best to be approached from their own perspective. To create better and more useful content, experts by experience who went through the system can be contracted to help policy makers and local care-givers improve the services and the information that is provided. These results in well-informed citizens who can use the information to be better informed, take better control of their lives and assert their rights.

Governments can play an active role in disseminating information, but the success of its information policy can, as is in bigger countries such as China, rely heavily on the success of information dissemination provided by a broad range of social organisations and NGO’s which supplement the government efforts. Therefore, a central point of contact responsible for providing information towards these organisations can be necessary in order to ensure that all organisations provide the same level of services for all citizens alike.

Organisations that operate on the local level can because of their closeness to their target groups, be one of the most important actors for providing social assistance services and inform possible beneficiaries about the different forms of social assistance they can get. It is important to examine that all necessary steps are taken to ensure that all beneficiaries take up their benefits and aren’t hindered because of fear of stigmatization.

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3.3.3 The Publicity of Social Assistance Laws and Regulations (Techniques and Instruments Used for Dissemination of Information)

Policy recommendation report

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1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION AND THE PUBLICISING OF POLICIES RELATED TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

1.1 The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is an important mechanism for administering the social assistance system

As one of the important parts of the social assistance system, the work related to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is highly relevant to the administration of the social assistance system and the implementation of social assistance policies. It is, also related to image of social assistance system held by society and its credibility in the eyes of the public. In recent years, as the Chinese government has made progress in building up its public administration under the rule of law, and the Chinese people have gained greater awareness of the rule of law, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has become not only a fundamental element of social assistance work, but also a mechanism that guarantees the dissemination of the policies, the improvement of its management and the legalization of the administration of the social assistance system. It is vital in respect of improving the rule of law in the field of social assistance. Therefore its role is becoming more and more prominent. A better program relating to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is conducive to building up an interactive framework between the public administration and the general public. In this way the population, especially those in difficulty, can have better understanding of the social assistance system and will give more support to the system. Of course, this will benefit the social assistance system of China and lead the system to being developed in an equitable and sustainable way.

1.2 The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is an objective requirement under the legalization of the social assistance system

The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance can be an effective way of protecting the population's right to know about, to participate in and to supervise the running of the social assistance system. As an important part of the social protection policy system, the social assistance system is directly related to the governance of poverty and the guaranteeing of the population's basic livelihood. It is a benefit close to the population's hearts especially those who are impoverished. Practical approaches must be adopted in order to improve the institutional arrangements for social assistance system. In the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the party set out its goal in the field of social assistance as follows:

"Coordinating the social assistance system for the urban and the rural areas; perfecting the Dibao system; ensuring equality between males and females as a fundamental national policy; protecting the rights of women and children; perfecting the systems of social assistance, charity, social welfare, veterans' welfare and improving the care systems for the children, the women and the elderly left in rural areas."[68] "Consolidating the political structure at grassroots level, improving the democratic framework for this level, and protecting the population's right to know about, to participate in, to express views on and to supervise the government."[69]

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[68] Xi Jinping's Report to the 19th National Congress of CPC, http://politics.gmw.cn/2017-10/27/content_26628091.htm

[69] Xi Jinping's Report on the 19th National Congress of CPC, http://politics.gmw.cn/2017-10/27/content_26628091.htm

For coordinating the social assistance systems of the urban and rural areas, and perfecting the Dibao system, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance play an important role. Better publicity relating to the Dibao policies can improve the development of the Dibao system. Then the system can be perfectly optimized. At the same time, the dissemination of information about, and the publicising of policies related to, social assistance is also an institutional arrangement and a practice in protecting the population’s right to know about, to participate in, to express a view on and to supervise the public administration. It gives the population the opportunity to know better about the running of the social assistance system. People can therefore participate in the development of the social assistance system. More social forces can have the opportunity to participate in the same processes, and the subject and objects of social assistance can interact with each other, promoting the development of social assistance in China. Besides, in developing the rule of law for China, the Chinese people can gain more and more awareness and understanding of it. Therefore they have higher expectations relating to the management of social assistance. The social assistance system should be more and more compliant to scientific laws and legal regulations. People also require more social assistance information to be disclosed to them. For social assistance administrators, it is a pressing necessity to improve their work in this direction, and enhance their ability and methods to disseminate information and publicise the policies related to social assistance.

1.3 The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is a realistic need for improving the environment relating to social assistance

For its regular and enhanced development, the social assistance system should gain the understanding, support and recognition from the whole of society. Thus, social forces should be motivated to participate in the development of social assistance, forming an open and shared framework for it. To achieve this dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is critical in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to the development of social assistance. Several approaches can be adopted in this regard.

Firstly, through the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance we can actively transmit the various policies and development results of social assistance, establish a good social image for the healthy development of China's social assistance, and constantly enhance the credibility of China's social assistance management.

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese government established the social assistance system on the basis of a publicly-owned economy, and after the 1978 Reforms, the Chinese social assistance system has seen many innovations in its general regime and its concrete institutions. These are following the transition of the old economy to the market economy. When compared with social assistance in the EU Member States, the Chinese social assistance system has a shorter history. The Chinese social assistance system has expanded significantly since its establishment, and the benefits under the social assistance programs have been increasing. With more and more programs having been developed, the Chinese social assistance system is getting better and better. The management of the social assistance system is also getting better as more policies are being implemented. Thus, a safety net in China is created through the social assistance system. China has also accumulated a great amount of practical experiences in this field. The solutions adopted by China are actually intelligent and practical contributions to social equality and poverty reduction. According to the 2017 Statistical Communiqué of Social Services released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs “as at the end of 2017, there were 12.6 million urban Dibao recipients. Fiscal expenditure of governments at all levels on the urban Dibao scheme was 64 billion RMB. In 2017, the national average urban Dibao benefit was 540.6 RMB per person every month.

There were 40.4 million people receiving a rural Dibao benefit, and the fiscal expenditure on this scheme was 10.5 billion RMB. In 2017, the national average rural Dibao benefit was 4,300.7 RMB/person for the year."[70] As the Chinese social assistance system enters a new era, it is in need of a scientific analysis of the system in order to understand what phase the Chinese social assistance is in, and what the characteristics it has today. The practical achievements of the Chinese social assistance system should be objectively analysed and the story of the Chinese social assistance should be presented to the world in a better way. The experiences of Chinese social assistance system, including the success and best practices, should also be shared with the international community to help the fight against poverty and to contribute to the alleviation of poverty across the world.

Secondly, as part of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance, it would be helpful to promote the modernization of the capacity to manage poverty and to optimize the quality of social assistance system's operation. On the one hand, the Central and Local Governments of China have issued a great number of policies on social assistance, which make up a huge system of social assistance policies and a safety net for the population. The institutional improvements require improving the ability of the officials in the civil affairs system to interpret and implement the policies. On the other hand, for the implementation of the policies, the population, especially the recipients of social assistance benefits, should also gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the social assistance policies. Therefore, the public administration should improve people's awareness of the laws and regulation on social assistance, and advance the rule of law in the public administration for consolidating the authority, justice and equality of the social assistance system. This is the way to improve the quality of social assistance in China.

1.4 The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is an important content and a requirement for the development of the rule of law in China's social assistance program

The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is not only an important mechanism for the social assistance system to be run in a healthy way, but also an objective requirement of the legalization of the social assistance system. The Interim Measures on Social Assistance, promulgated on May 1st 2014, state clearly that "people's governments above the county level and their departments for social assistance should spread the laws, regulations and policies on social assistance through media such as newspapers, broadcast, television and Internet, etc. People's governments above the county level and their departments for social assistance should publicize information on the management and the utilization of funds and materials for social assistance in ways which are convenient to the population, such as information rooms, information stations, bulletin boards etc; and accept supervision by the public." Following the process of its legalization, social assistance is more and more important in a political sense. Therefore, a huge number of social assistance policies have been made intensively in recent years, while the adjustment of the policies has also been intensive. The policies and the adjustments have paved the way for the better running of the social assistance system. Thus it is very much necessary to intensify the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

2. THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES AND THE INSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION AND THE PUBLICISING OF POLICIES RELATED TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CHINA

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[70] Statistical Bulletin of Social Services Development in 2017, http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjgb/2017/201708021607.pdf

In recent years, the Chinese Central and Local Governments at all levels have paid much greater attention to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies. Governments have been made great efforts to promote the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. These efforts have been effective in that they have strengthened the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance assistance system, leading it to be run in a scientific way. We see a lot of practical experiences and institutional outcomes in this field.

2.1 China's governments at all levels, especially the central government, play an important leading and guiding role in the the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance policy

Since the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China and the local authorities of Civil Affairs consider the work of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance an important field, many policies are made for it, and these polices have promoted the development of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance in most regions. They are the guides for the practice of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. For instance, the *"2013 the Notice from the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China on Launching the Social Assistance Publicity Week"* emphasizes that the Civil Affairs' authorities *m*ust keep in mind a uniform understanding of their work, and must work on the key fields of publicity, innovate approaches and methods, and consolidate the organization and coordination for the publicity. Finally, the Ministry of Civil Affairs had listed the work on the social assistance publicity week as a part of the Performance Assessment on Civil Affairs. In particular, for the innovation of approaches and methods, the Notice emphasizes that "the agencies must employ service windows, parks, public spaces, hospitals, rural Bulletin Board of Statistics (BBS)[71], and utilize the approaches like pictures, brochures, consultancy initiatives, and 'real-time administration' to promote the publicity of social assistance. Local broadcasts, television, newspapers and magazines should be coordinated, and ways like specific columns, knowledge contests, writing contests, and hotlines for complaints should all be integrated, in order to have extensive channels and innovative approaches to enhance the effect of the publicity. New ways like social media should also be employed, and official websites of the Government should be used for spreading social assistance policies. A Governmental Weibo account should be employed for the same purpose, and a Weibo Interview and a Weibo Column should be organized to provide people with policy interpretation and information feedback in a timely manner.

People should be encouraged to take photos and post Weibo messages about social assistance events or policies. This way, the coverage of social assistance publicity can be broader."[72] At the same time, the local authorities of the Civil Affairs agencies have explored new ways for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and they have achieved a great number of successful experiences in practice. These have helped in constructing an interactive framework between the Central and Local Governments in this field. For instance, in order to strengthen the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and improve the capacity of grassroots social assistance administrators, the Civil Affairs Bureau of Jinghai District, Tianjin city, launched a Publicity Month for Social Assistance Policies, in which the agency held policy lectures and Q&A sessions in public spaces. The population were able to get knowledge of the benefit standards, eligibility, the checking and approval procedures for social assistance, as well as relevant materials and books.[73]

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[71] BBS,is the abbreviation of Bulletin Board System,which has become a new kind of media, through which people can share information and message in communities.

[72] *Notice of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on the Work of Promoting Social Assistance Week,* http://mzzt.mca.gov.cn/article/ygjznwj/zcwj/201310/20131000532236.shtml

2.2 The dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is in transition in the process of legalization

Since the establishment of the new social assistance system in China, social assistance has seen great developments and achievements. These can be evidenced by an increase in coverage, benefits, programs, and social assistance policies. A particular improvement is in the participation of social forces. This has deeply impacted the structure and content of the social assistance system, and has moved the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance forward. Several facts are relevant to this shift:

First, the main body of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance tends to be diversified from simplification. In the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance information the governments at different levels still play the role of the leading facilitator and primary channel, while individuals and organizations in society are also playing their parts in this field. In some cases, their roles are really important. A typical example is charity in China, for which some NGOs play positive and active roles. The NGOs have diverse ways of spreading the information and concepts of social assistance and charity. These are becoming an aspect more and more important player in the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance in China.

Second, the means for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance policy tend to be diversified from simplification. Since China established the new social assistance system, the government has been always emphasizing the importance of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance for which the Government has conducted many relevant activities across the country. In the process of the legalization of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and with the active promotion and exploration by the Chinese Central and Local Governments, diverse models and types for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance have been developed. In particular, following the rapid development of the Internet and the mobile Internet in China, the traditional models and approaches to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance are changing, impacting the environment of, and conditions for, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. These have, of course, changed the impact of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Currently, in the practices of iinformation dissemination and policy publicity of social assistance, websites, Weibo, We-chat, newspapers, radio and television have all been adopted as important platforms or approaches for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance which has expanded the audience coverage and increased the influence of social assistance in society.

Third, the content of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance policy tends to be diversified from simplification. The diversification of content for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is closely related to the expansion of social assistance work during the legalization

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[73] *Jinghai District Civil Affairs Bureau Launched the Social Assistance Policy Publicity Month Activitie*s, http://www.tjmz.gov.cn/mzxw/system/2016/03/14/010028496.shtml

of the social assistance system. Over the years, the Chinese social assistance system has been transformed from a traditional system to a modern one. It has also been transformed from a system in which the rural and urban areas were split to a new system that coordinates both areas. The content of the social assistance system has, therefore, become diversified, including the Dibao program, the Tekun program, Disaster Relief, Health Assistance, Education Assistance, Housing Assistance, Employment Assistance, Temporary Assistance and social participation. For these, the content of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance becomes richer and richer, which means more and more work, should be handled by the players. Meanwhile, following the establishment of the new social assistance system in China, the size of social assistance system tends to have increased in comparison with the past, covering a huge number of target groups. This has actually changed the structure of the social assistance beneficiaries. Today, the structure of the social assistance beneficiaries is also characterized by diversity.

The elderly, children, people with a disability, poor peasants and urban residents are all covered by the social assistance system. This has brought new requirements relating to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

2.3 A multilevel regulation system for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has been developed

Following the development of social assistance in China, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has become an inalienable part of the social assistance system. In the practice, the framework for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has integrated the traditional and modern ways, the offline and online approaches, and governmental and non-governmental channels. A hierarchy of regulations for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has been developed. In the legalization of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance a system that includes the regulations on the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance made by national and local governments has been formed. These are the basis for the administration for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistanc. For instance, the *1999 Regulation on the Urban Dibao* states that "as regards to the urban resident who receive the approval to receive a benefit under the Urban Dibao, the managerial agency should publicize the information on the approved household, and the recipient should accept supervision by the public."[74] The *2009 Sichuan Provincial Measure on the Rural Dibao* states that "the Government shall reward the organizations or individuals who have good performance in the work for the Rural Dibao."[75] The *2005 Suzhou Municipal Measure on Social Assistance* states that "the Governments of the municipality and the counties/districts, as well as their social assistance agencies, shall employ newspapers, broadcasts, televisions, Internet and public videos and audios to spread the laws, regulations and policies on social assistance. The Governments of the municipality and the counties/districts, as well as the social assistance agencies, shall establish and perfect the system for disseminating social assistance information, for which the ways shall include public information rooms, information stations, information bulletin boards, and official websites of Governments. The information on social assistance policies and the utilization and the management of the social assistance funds and materials shall be publicized in a timely manner in order to accept the supervision of the public."[76]

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[74] *The Regulations on the Dibao for Urban Residents,* http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=14722

[75] *The Measures on the Dibao for Rural Residents in Sichuan Province,* http://www.scmz.gov.cn/ZhongDian/Detail?id=17185

The *Shenyang Municipal Regulations on Implementing the Rural and the Urban Dibao* state that "the Government shall set up a system for publicity and feedback. A community/village committee shall publicize the names of the members of the family that are recent or on-going beneficiaries of the Urban and the Rural Dibao at certain times and places, and shall feedback their publication to the street office/people's government of the township. For the publication, the privacy of the beneficiaries shall be protected, and any information which is not relevant to the Dibao program shall not be publicized."[77]

3. MAJOR CHALLANGES

Nowadays, in the process of the legalization of the Chinese social assistance system, there are several realistic problems and challenges existing. The first is the imbalance of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance among different regions: the economically developed areas and the underdeveloped areas, and the rural and urban regions. The second is the need to optimize the environment for the social assistance system. To achieve the objective of a legalized social assistance system, the policy environment, media environment and cultural environment for social assistance still need to be optimized. The third is the need to improve the framework for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Currently, the work related to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is separately conducted by different governmental agencies and social organizations, without institutional integration, coordination, harmonization and articulation. This is not in accordance with the objective of building up a coordinated social assistance system. In particular, there is a need for a better top-level design for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and a better guide for local governments to implement the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. The fourth is the need to improve public's awareness of social assistance policies. In recent years, for the legalization of social assistance and the reduction of poverty, the Chinese Central and Local Governments have made a great number of polices with improved strictness, professionality, and sophistication. However, due to some constraints, some people were not quite aware of the policies. Due to stigma related to social assistance, or a lack of channels (for example there might be no access to Internet in poor families), people lose the capacity to apply for the benefits. In addition, due to their educational background, some people in need are not capable of understanding the policies. The fifth is the need to regularize the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. At present, the major problem with the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is the degree of regularization, which needs to be improved. In the process of expanding the work on the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance information there is also a need to regularize this work. Therefore the work on the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance can be built on a basis with institutional guarantee. The sixth is the lack of innovation in the field of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. In recent years, the importance of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has been emphasized by the Government, and the regularization of the work had been improved. Besides, many good experiences and approaches have been accumulated through practice. However, the approaches currently adopted in the work of i the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance are dominated by the traditional ways,

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[76] *The Measures for the Implementation of Social Assistance in Suzhou,* http://www.mzj.suzhou.gov.cn/szmz/zcfg/MoreInfo.aspx?CategoryNum=004

[77] *Rules for the Implementation of Dibao system for Urban and Rural Residents in Shenyang,* http://www.shenyang.gov.cn/zwgk/system/2016/12/26/010168891.shtml

These are not compatible with a social assistance system in the Internet era. The ways are not diversified, and the formats are old. The coverage of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is relatively low, while practical innovation is inadequate for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

4. KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Promoting the comprehensive and balanced development of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance

In response to the unbalanced development of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance the Central Government should continue to take the lead in the top-level policy design. In areas where the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is lagging behind, efforts must be strengthened, and exchanges and studies of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance across different regions should be enhanced. The objective for this is clear: to promote the comprehensive and balanced development of the information dissemination relating to social assistance. It is necessary to further coordinate the relationship between the Central and Local Governments, and to attach greater importance to the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance, viewing it as a key starting point and effective vehicle for the publicising, and implementation of, social assistance policies. The areas that are relatively backward in the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance should make greater efforts to learn from the experiences of the regions where the work is of a higher standard. In particular, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance in the rural areas of China is weaker. For rural regions, this field should be strengthened through institutional and personnel development. This will lay the foundations for the standardized and legalized social assistance in the rural areas, and it will of course help social assistance to reach its goals.

4.2 Standardization of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance should be improved

It is necessary to formulate a nation-wide approach to managing the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance to work in this field. The authorities should strive to standardize the dissemination of information related to social assistance. In particular, there should be unified regulations on the contents, forms and duration of the publication of the information on the Dibao beneficiaries. The border between the public’s right to know about the implementation of social assistance and the right of a beneficiary to protect their personal privacy should be clearly defined. When disclosing social assistance information, it is necessary to perfect the norms on information disclosure, and make efforts to standardize the style, the texts, and the duration of the disclosure to achieve consistency among the different agencies.

4.3 Strengthen the guidance of Internet public opinion and build the spokesman system for social assistance information network

Social assistance is directly related to the harmony and stability of society and therefore has an important social and political significance. In recent years, the political importance of social assistance has increased significantly. It has played an important role in the promotion of social equity, justice, and poverty governance. At the same time, with the development of social assistance, more social policies have been introduced in recent years, making this period fulfilled by social assistance policies. Society pays more attention to social affairs, especially the social assistance programs and events such as Dibao, charities and disaster relief. For this, there is an urgent need to actively respond to the public's concerns and use the correct way to lead the public's opinion online. This helps to promote the disclosure of government information, and to protect citizens' rights to information and expression. Finally it will establish a good image of social assistance, on the basis of the timely and accurate disclosure of information related to social assistance. This is the right way to respond to the public. New channels should be established for the interaction between the public and the Government. All these would create a favourable environment for the public's opinion of social assistance.

4.4 Introducing innovation in the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance

In recent years, following the development of social assistance, the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance has been strengthened. This is seen through an increase in, and the perfection of, regulations on and guidance for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. However, compared with the demand for building up a legalized and standardized social assistance system, there is still a gap in reality. It is therefore necessary to develop social assistance with the objectives set out under the rule of law. It is right to further improve the institutions for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. The process involves better work norms and managerial methods. The impact of policy publicity should be incorporated into the performance evaluation of social assistance. In addition, it is suggested to improve the quality of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance which should focus on the wider coverage of the publicity and result in high level awareness of social assistance policies among the general public.

4.5 Improving the professionalization of social assistance, and providing better human resources as guarantee for the better the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance

To enhance social governance and strengthen the management and services of social assistance, there must be a good team built up to deliver social assistance. The team should be made up of good team members who are able to integrate professional knowledge with practical capabilities. This is necessary for the modernization of China's social assistance program and its governance. Since its establishment, China's new social assistance has involved human resources whose quality is getting better and better. However, following the trends of the modernization, professionalization, and legalization of social assistance, it is still necessary to strengthen the human resources to provide efficient and effective social assistance. With scientific and high-quality services, it is easier to improve the publicity, communication, and interpretation of social assistance policies. Under the principle of service and under the rule of law, the human resources for social assistance programs should be improved so as to provide the necessary guarantees for ensuring the high-quality dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen the multilevel human resources training for social assistance staff and especially to strengthen the education and the training for social workers at the grass-roots level (including philosophy, methods, professional knowledge, operational skills, professional ethics of social work etc.). Of course, the concept of the rule of law should be promoted among the staff and a better legal system should be established for social assistance. Experts in relevant areas could be invited to give lectures to trainees, and special training on the laws and the regulations should be conducted. Funds should be expended on these trainings, which should be regularized and institutionalized. Thus, professional training in the field of social assistance can better adapt itself to the new context resulting from the enhanced rule of law in China and meet the requirements for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

4.6 International and domestic exchanges and cooperation in the field of social assistance should be more for sharing experiences from all over the world

Since its establishment, the Chinese social assistance system has experienced rapid development. In the process of the legalization of social assistance China has gradually formed a special policy system for social assistance, and has also generated a special culture and philosophy towards social assistance. At present, the political importance of social assistance has grown and it is necessary to further improve China's social assistance policies through continuous reform. Among others methods, studying and learning from the policy experiences of social assistance in developing and developed countries is significant.

It helps to promote policy and institutional innovation for China's social assistance and anti-poverty practice in the international context.

Many aspects of social assistance require in-depth research and exchanges. These include theoretical issues and policy issues. Policy dialogue should be conducted with different countries to jointly explore ways to achieve the goals of global poverty governance. The achievements of different civilizations and their policy practices should be exchanged. The rapid development of social assistance in China and its extensive international influence have also triggered foreign scholars' interest China's social assistance policies. Therefore, international exchanges and policy dialogue in the field of social assistance can provide opportunities for the Chinese and foreign experts and social assistance managers to learn from, and exchange with, each other. China's social assistance system has some areas common to those in foreign social assistance systems, especially EU Member States' social assistance systems. Thus they are all facing some issues and difficulties in the governance of poverty and related fields, including: developing social assistance systems in the context of aging; the issue of welfare dependency in social assistance; building a child-centred social assistance system through reforms; the relationship between social assistance and active labour market policies; the adjustment mechanism of social assistance benefits etc.

Therefore, the international cooperation between China and Europe on social assistance is not simply that China learns experiences from the European Union. Instead, China and the EU, as partners, have explored some common practical problems in the field of social assistance, and they can learn from, and share experiences, with each other. In this way, China's social assistance program can be promoted. At the same time, for developing social assistance in China, it is also necessary to strengthen the dissemination of the social assistance culture. To the world, it is necessary to promote China's solutions for social assistance and China's plan for poverty governance. These can provide the international community with the experience of poverty reduction in China.

4.7 To further enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance

Information is very important to the goal of achieving social assistance, and it is also an important working mechanism for the operation of the social assistance system. In this respect, we need precise policies and targeted governance. In particular, "targeted identification is the prerequisite for targeted governance. Targeted identification is the precondition for targeted governance. In social assistance, due to the different problems between the urban and the rural areas and among the different social groups, targeted social assistance should be classified into different measures and classified governance. This is very important for the the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

We need to adhere to the concept of targeted policy publicity and implement targeted governance. At present, many people who are covered by the Dibao system are the elderly, the disabled and the chronically ill. They have great difficulty in, and obstacles to, obtaining information. The elderly do not want to use the Internet and some of them can not access the Internet for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen social surveys, through which we can better understand the real situation of the poor and their social needs, and then put forward targeted different ways and methods of information dissemination.

4.8 To promote the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance in strengthening community governance

China's Dibao system is community-based social assistance. Under this situation, the role of community in the governance of poverty, especially the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance is fully brought into play. Community is the living place of residents. The residents' committees of the urban and rural communities have direct contact with their residents, especially the poor, and have unique advantages in the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Authorities must give full play to the communities in establishing an information platform that can be managed by the community workers and social workers responsible for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Some of these approaches should include policy bulletin boards in the community, the compilation of social assistance policies, social assistance manuals and leaflets, provision of social services, the posting of social assistance laws and regulations, conducting community social assistance policy lectures and talks, face-to-face exchanges of officials with people in difficulty, We should further expand the awareness rate of social assistance policies for the public, especially the poor families. Efforts should be made to enhance the social workers' ability to interpret and implement social assistance policies. It is necessary to dissolve social concerns for special groups of social assistance beneficiaries living in the community. There should be some regularized approaches for community officials to contact Dibao recipients, introducing relevant social assistance policies to them in a timely manner, and doing a good job in interpreting the policies. Psychological counselling mechanisms should be adopted in social work services. Institutions and other professional social organizations should provide more humanistic care and social assistance to the urban and rural communities, especially to the poor population, poor children, people with mental disorders, community prisoners, released prisoners and abandoned children, women, and the elderly.[78] To meet the needs of vulnerable groups for information and policy, there should also be strengthened efforts, which will also provide for better community governance.

In addition, efforts should be made to develop a smart community, strengthening the informatization of the urban and rural communities and expanding the coverage of publicising social assistance policy through the use of new media such as Weibo, We-chat, and mobile clients, so as to increase the level of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance.

4.9 Further strengthen innovative developments for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance

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[78] *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Strengthening and Improving Urban and Rural Community Governance,* http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/topnew/201706/20170600004773.shtml

In respect of the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance focus should be placed on innovations for management and tools. It is necessary to strengthen exchanges in the publicity of social assistance policy. Today, the tools for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance need to be further improved. The authorities must make efforts in this regard. Regular or irregular meetings should be hold for exchanging the experiences on the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Some useful practices and innovative experiences can be found in the different regions. Thus it is especially important to strengthen the exchange of experiences with them. This helps to promote innovations in both management and the institutional design.

We should further strengthen the innovative development for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and raise the awareness of the social assistance policies through various channels. In this regard, the ways should be diversified. Firstly, traditional ways, like banners, information bulletin boards and slogans should be fully utilized for the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance. Secondly, social assistance should be adapted to the Internet era, which means a new ecology of “Internet + social assistance” should be established. Local civil affairs departments should be encouraged to set up WeChat public accounts to strengthen the the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and realize the organic combination of social assistance and the development of Internet. In this regard, an example is the Tianjin Bureau of Civil Affairs, which produces videos with texts for interpreting social assistance policies on the website of Tianjin Municipality (www.tj.gov.cn).[79] This is a better way to improve the public’s awareness and understanding of social assistance policies. Mass media and new media should be employed and their role in increasing the public’s awareness of social assistance policies should be enlarged. Newspapers, radio, television and online media should all be adopted to achieve this end. Thirdly, the resident’s community should be considered fundamental in the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance and its special functions should be adopted. The Chinese social assistance system is based on communities, and this must be recognized. For implementing the work on the dissemination of information and the publicising of policies related to social assistance the community is important. For this, the staff of community for information dissemination and policy publicity of social assistance should improve their work on interpreting and implementing social assistance polices, as well as assisting community residents. This is the foundation for a better social assistance program.

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