

## DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The contemporary state more and more often uses modern information technologies (IT). Public institutions collect data on many aspects of our lives, such as paid work, family or health condition. IT enables the processing of that information on a scale not encountered before. In result, it becomes an inherent part of policy-making process and it is often believed to be scientific as it uses algorithms that are difficult to understand for a general public. No matter how sophisticated IT seems, digitalization of the state also entails risks, which we are trying to pinpoint in this project, analyzing the specific example of IT that has been applied in Polish local labor offices since 2014— a tool profiling the unemployed.

It is a computer-aided statistical tool, that serves to categorize unemployed persons. The algorithm embedded in the software significantly affects the life situation and professional chances of the unemployed, since depending a categorisation different procedures are applied. Assigning an unemployed person to two out of three profiles can close a path to some vocational activation programmes, unless the frontline caseworker changes the automatic classification, which happens very rarely. The pilot study, carried out briefly after the reform, has also shown that a large number of the unemployed considered to be persons of the lowest “employment potential” (approx. 33% of the population of the unemployed) were deprived of access to the programs with the highest positive employment effects. Therefore, there is a risk of discrimination originating from the design of the tool and the way categorisations are linked with public services. Surprisingly, principles of operation of the profiling tool have not been examined yet.

The basic objective of the project is to obtain the empirically grounded knowledge on the process of creating the technology used for classifying unemployed persons, the principles of its operation and ways it is used in administrative practice by frontline staff. The results of this research will also make it possible to display the new risks emerging from the use of IT in public policy for democratic accountability and the rule of law (e.g. a shift of decision-making power to new actors such as system analysts or software designers, non-transparent principles of public services distribution or the absence of a possibility to appeal against automatic classification). The project will also allow to disseminate and to develop critical analyses of public policy, less known in Poland. Instead of focusing on official premises of the reform or impersonal processes, we will present how public policy – with IT as its core element –is practiced and experienced.

The project is interdisciplinary as it groups together qualitative sociologists, a lawyer and a statistician. It also combines qualitative and quantitative research methods and takes into account the perspective of various actors involved in policy-making and policy-implementation. First part of the research takes closer look at how the IT was created. It is based on the analysis of regulations and formal documents (e.g. transcripts of parliamentary discussions) as well as individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with the actors involved in the design of profiling and representatives of public institutions which could assess its legality. Subsequently, we will analyze the very technology and statistical procedures applied in the Polish variant of profiling. We will compare the latter with other profiling models applied in European Union countries through consultations with foreign experts and literature review. In the final part we plan to carry out a representative quantitative research of local labor offices, case studies in 4 selected localities, composed of 64 individual in-depth interviews.

We will present the results of the research in a series of academic publications, during conferences and in the form of practical recommendations.