



'Mutual learning workshop on access to social protection: data, indicators and monitoring systems'

Thematic Discussion Paper 1

Improving the Monitoring of Access to Social Protection: Good Practices and ways forward

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1. Introduction

This report examines the steps taken by the European Union Member States (MS) to improve monitoring of access to social protection systems for workers and the self-employed, with a particular focus on those in non-standard work.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed in 2017 prioritises social protection as a fundamental principle. Since 2019, this principle has received increased attention following the EU Recommendation on access to social protection (2019/C 387/01)¹ (hereafter referred to as the 'Recommendation'). The Recommendation outlines four central pillars: formal access, effective access, adequacy and transparency of social protection. It advocates improved formal and effective access to social protection for all workers, whether in standard or non-standard employment, and for all self-employed. The Recommendation also emphasises the need for adequate social protection that not only ensures basic income security but also the maintenance of living standards. Finally, the Recommendation emphasises the importance of transparency in social protection, recommending improved (or maintenance of) access to information and a reduction in administrative complexity.

In its Implementation Report to the Council², the European Commission highlights that several Member States have reformed their social protection systems to improve access and adequacy for non-standard workers and the self-employed. However, the report also points to significant differences in the level of ambition of these efforts. Crucially, it notes that most reforms do not address all the coverage gaps identified by the EU-agreed monitoring framework³ or the European Semester. Furthermore, the Commission expresses concern that some Member States where non-standard workers and the self-employed remain under-covered have not yet submitted sufficiently ambitious reform plans (European Commission 2023: 26-27). Member States have developed policies and strategies to improve coverage and ensure that all workers can effectively access and benefit from social protection systems. However, a prominent issue is, in a number of Member States, the lack of strategies and tools for (comprehensive) monitoring of access to social protection and especially in terms of evidence gathering.

The report highlights initiatives to improve data collection and monitoring practices, which are crucial for understanding and addressing gaps in social protection. The guiding question of this thematic background paper is the following:

- To what extent Member States (MS) have developed/are developing policies and comprehensive strategies related to monitoring access to social protection for workers and self-employed, with a particular focus on evidence and data gathering.

The objective is to explore whether Member States developed or are developing monitoring policies following their commitment through the 2019 Council recommendation, particularly in relation to article 17 of the Recommendation. The latter recommends Member States “to collect and publish, where possible, reliable national statistics on access to the various forms of social protection, for example broken down by labour market status (self-employed/employee), type of employment relationship (temporary or permanent, part-time

¹ Council of the EU (2019) Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, 2019/C 387/01. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-ontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019H1115%2801%29>

² European Commission (2023) Report from the Commission to the Council on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, News, 31.01.2023.

³ Monitoring framework on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (2020), v.0 available: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8358&furtherPubs=yes>, updated 2023: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=27549&langId=en>

or full-time, new forms of work or standard employment), gender and age, by 15 November 2021”.

Two sub-questions are considered as well:

- New rules, which help to signal issues with access to social protection and disincentivise abusive use of non-standard forms of work;
- How is non-standard work taken into account when MS prepare reforms? (i.e. the number of/impact on individuals in non-standard forms of employment when preparing reforms of social protection systems).

By examining examples from different countries, the paper underlines the importance of accurate and comprehensive strategies, including data strategies for monitoring the effectiveness and reach of social protection policies. Examples include the use of new data evaluation tools, such as impact assessments, micro- modelling to understand how reforms affect different groups within the workforce. The paper also discusses the role of digital tools and administrative improvements in improving the efficiency and transparency of social protection systems.

The first section focuses on overarching strategies implemented by Member States to improve monitoring and data collection on access to social protection, in particular for workers in non-standard forms of employment. The second section examines specific reforms aimed at strengthening statistical monitoring and improving data availability regarding coverage of specific groups, i.e. it discusses targeted measures to ensure that workers in non-traditional forms of employment, including the self-employed, have access to (adequate) social protection. Section three highlights the role integrated data systems and digital solutions in simplifying access, improving data accuracy and facilitating real-time monitoring of social protection. It also examines how the establishment of specialised institutions and cross-sectoral cooperation can support the continuous and systematic monitoring of access to social protection. The report concludes with a summary assessment of current policies and recommendations for future improvements in monitoring and extending access to social protection across the EU.

2. National strategies and policies for monitoring workers' access to social protection

This section focuses on strategies and policies put in place to enhance monitoring of access to social protection. Despite the fact that the 2019 Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed encourages Member States to improve the availability of national statistics on access to social protection, only a few Member States (BE, DK, FI, MT, PT) have reported (in their national plans submitted in 2021-22) planning specific measures related to the production and gathering of statistical data. Moreover, while many Member States do have data, mostly from administrative sources, it is not always broken down by type of employment relationship, gender or age, and there have been, until recently, limited attempts made to estimate the coverage rate by the various branches of social protection (Eurofound 2024; European Commission 2023).

The section presents cross-cutting strategies and policies to enhance access to social protection monitoring, before discussing strategies and policies focusing on non-standard workers.

2.1. Polices and reforms to improve statistical monitoring

In the existing EU monitoring framework, the indicators on access to social protection are divided into three main categories: (1) performance indicators, which focus on the outcomes of the Recommendation; (2) context indicators, which indicate the prevalence of non-standard employment and self-employment as well as the occurrence of risks throughout people's career; and (3) policy levers, which describe the rules governing entitlements and contributions of the social protection schemes in each Member State. The performance indicators are further divided into formal, effective, and adequate coverage. The main data source for performance indicators is the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey (EU-SILC) as well as the EU-LFS, complemented by national reporting on formal coverage.

However, the absence of complete data, especially on assets or adherence to conditionality requirements (such as requirements to engage in job search and training, accept job offers, and attend scheduled visits at the employment office) (see also Eurofound 2024) can complicate accurate take-up estimates. Moreover, one may also more generally question the general problems with survey-based data (underrepresentation/exclusion from sample of groups; mis-reporting, etc), comparability issues with datasets (e.g. EU-SILC), and lack of possibility to identify specific benefit receipt. (see also Eurofound 2024). Box 1 presents examples of recent national initiatives to improve the statistical monitoring of access to social protection, in particular for non-standard workers and the self-employed.

Box 1: Examples of recent policy changes that improve statistical monitoring

Belgium

To ensure the availability of objective and timely data, a key focus of implementing the 2019 Council Recommendation is on the increased use of administrative data in policy formulation and monitoring, particularly in the areas of social security, health, and taxation. To achieve this, a collaborative approach was established with key data providers and users, in order to meet the Recommendation call (i.e. provision n°17: to collect and publish reliable national statistics on access to social protection by November 15, 2021, with breakdowns, where possible, by employment status, type of employment, gender, and age).

In terms of statistical data, Belgium's national plan for the implementation of the 2019 Council Recommendation (Van Limberghen et al. 2021) notes that monitoring poverty, especially the impact of social transfers (except pensions) on reducing poverty, is a central aspect of for monitoring effective and adequate access. This includes the use of EU social indicators such as the AROP (at-risk-of poverty) indicator, the material and social deprivation indicator as well as the relative median poverty risk gap indicator to measure the depth of poverty.

Malta

The 2019 Maltese national plan for access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, (Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights, 2021), underlines that disaggregated data is needed in order to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of non-standard forms of work and any remaining lack of parity. The Maltese government committed to three studies between late 2022 and 2024 on access to social protection⁴ (; as of June 2024, only the first of these three studies

⁴ Access to Social Protection for Workers and Self-employed: Unemployment Benefit planned for Q2, 2022; Access to Social Protection for Workers and Self-employed: Invalidity, and benefits in relation to accidents at work and occupational

(dealing with unemployment) is in the public domain (Seed Consultancy, 2022). The comprehensive evaluation detailed in the study is the first step of this process; a monitoring and evaluation framework will follow to ensure that adequacy and effectiveness are tracked on an ongoing basis. The following three steps are detailed below:

- **Develop a policy monitoring and evaluation framework based on measurable policy outcomes and outputs.** *An evidence-based policy outcome and output monitoring framework based on proposed performance metrics.*
- **Apply and test the proposed monitoring framework.** *A thorough testing process for the proposed monitoring framework to ensure that it is fit for purpose.*
- **Based on the results of the testing process, evaluate the proposed monitoring framework's outputs and outcomes.** *Recommend any appropriate amendments and/or recalibrations. A finalised monitoring framework that is fit for purpose and is available for roll-out by the Contracting Authority.*

Portugal

The Portuguese national plan under the Council Recommendation on access to social protection highlights that most self-employed individuals receive the same level of social protection as employees, with the main difference being eligibility for unemployment benefits. This gap remains due to challenges in proving involuntary unemployment for the self-employed, although the social security system provides broad formal coverage, aligning with Paragraph 8 of the Recommendation (República Portuguesa, 2021a).

The Portuguese national plan reflects proposals in the green paper on the future of work, aimed at "improving effectiveness and adequacy for atypical work modalities, so that the social security duty of ensuring income replacement social benefits does not lose its efficiency" (República Portuguesa, 2021a: 17). These include registering all workers in, and simplifying their access to social security, regardless of their legal status. Workers carrying out occasional or very intermittent activities are specifically identified as being among those with a higher risk of precariousness and whose social protection should be strengthened.

2.2. Policies and reforms with a focus on monitoring access for non-standard workers and the self-employed

Indicators of effective and adequate social protection coverage rely heavily on income data from the EU-SILC, particularly for calculating the at-risk-of-poverty rate (AROP). However, this income data has well-known limitations, especially concerning self-employment income which is not fully comparable across EU Member States due to varying legal definitions and data collection methods (European Commission and SPC, 2020). Even with harmonised data collection, self-reported income for the self-employed is not a reliable measure of social protection adequacy, as there may be issues of effective access (i.e. eligibility conditions difficult to meet etc.) as well as of under-reporting earnings or under-contributing to social protection systems (Spasova et al., 2017; Horemans and Marx, 2017). Box 2 describes measures to include non-standard forms of work in national monitoring processes in order

to better monitor access to social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed.

Box 2: Examples of recent policies focused on the inclusion of non-standard forms of work in monitoring processes

Cyprus

In 2019, Cyprus-launched structural reforms in order to permanently address gaps in the coverage of the self-employed in the branches covered by the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed.

.In 2024, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance explicitly referred to its intention to proceed with the electronic census of all self-employed individuals and deal with the phenomenon of bogus self-employment, which will facilitate the proper classification of all employees in the Social Insurance Services (MLSI, 2024).

Estonia

The procedures for self-employed individuals were streamlined with the introduction of the entrepreneur account policy in 2019. This system tracks the income and taxes of self-employed individuals, and the bank handling the account automatically sends the appropriate amounts to the Health Insurance Fund and Pension Fund (European Commission 2023).

Slovenia

Starting in 2023, the information system of the Centres for Social Work automatically collects data regarding the payment of social contributions for self-employed individuals and farmers (European Commission 2023).

3. Policies related to monitoring workers' access to social protection for specific groups of workers

This section focuses on specific policies that Member States have elaborated to improve monitoring of access to social protection regarding a specific group. We include relevant examples of policies regarding the monitoring of women's access to social protection; we also highlight examples of policies dedicated to monitoring the non-take-up of social benefits (i.e. non-receipt of benefits by people who fulfil the entitlement criteria, but do not apply or whose application is not approved for various reasons such as lack of information, stigma, or the complexity of the procedures). Box 3 highlights Italy's approach and outlines the measures taken within the National Strategy for Gender Equality to ensure inclusive monitoring of women's access to social protection across all types of employment.

Box 3: Examples of recent policies focused on capturing women's access to social protection

Italy

In July 2021, Italy adopted an overall strategy focused on gender equality, 'the National Strategy for Gender Equality' (Strategia nazionale per la parità di genere). Covering the period of 2021-2026, it focuses on the following areas: work, salaries/income, competencies, time, power, and the impact of COVID-19. Further, the National Strategy is a de facto government commitment encompassing gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. Specifically, it promotes measures for the integration of a gender perspective in all areas of social and economic life and policy, and for the dissemination of suitable tools to allow for the assessment of the impacts of public policies from a gender perspective (gender budget). The process of gender mainstreaming has been applied to all stages of statistical activities, and the integration of a gender perspective throughout the statistical system is considered a commitment to data quality and relevance (European Institute for Gender Equality 2023).

As previously stated, social protection remains an essential tool for reducing poverty, stabilising consumption, and fostering social mobility. However, most countries face challenges to reach **all individuals in need** of social benefits and services (Eurofound 2024). Coverage gaps arise due to various factors, such as exclusion from schemes, strict eligibility criteria, and non-receipt of benefits by people entitled to them (i.e. non-take-up, strict eligibility criteria, insufficient public funding to support all eligible beneficiaries, especially when considering non-standard workers). As a result, social benefits and services are not captured by people who are eligible for them. Non-take-up can have serious financial implications for households and limits the effectiveness of social protection systems.

Different countries have varying approaches to estimating non-take-up which is mostly problematic for minimum income schemes. For instance, an OECD study (OECD 2024) highlights that in the UK, official government agencies produce estimates, while in Germany, academic institutions handle this work. In the Netherlands, non-take-up is measured locally by private organisations using municipal data. Belgium and Finland have also increased their focus on non-take-up studies in recent years. . Box 4 presents MS strategies addressing non-take-up of social benefits, highlighting efforts to increase coverage and reduce barriers for eligible individuals.

Box 4: Examples of recent policies focused on capturing and addressing the non-take-up of social benefits

Belgium

In Belgium, the BELMOD project launched in 2019, with funding from the European Commission's Easi programme, and coordinated by the FPS Social Security, and has led to the development of a new microsimulation model, the BELMOD model. This new tool is based on the European microsimulation model EUROMOD, which makes it possible to simulate changes in both social assistance and social security, and runs on administrative data for a very large sample of the Belgian population. This model is instrumental in examining the impact of several measures aimed at reducing the non-take-up of social assistance in Belgium. These include income support, the income guarantee for the elderly (IGO), the income replacement allowance and integration allowance for persons with disabilities, the increased reimbursement for health expenses and the allowance from the social heating fund (Belmod, 2022).

Beyond tools to promote estimation of non-take up, it is also worth signalling mechanisms put in place by Belgium to address it: a) an automatic allocation of old-age pension rights when the legal retirement age is reached; b) an automatic allocation of a survivor's pension and a transitional benefit if the deceased partner was entitled to an old-age pension; c) a semi-automatic allocation of maternity allowance; d) from 2017, an automatic exemption from social security contributions for the quarter following the quarter of childbirth + automatic allocation of pension rights for the same quarter: As soon as the social security fund has been informed that the self-employed woman has become a mother, it contacts the mother on its own initiative to ask whether she wishes to receive the maternity benefit. The mother only has to confirm whether she wishes to receive the benefit; e) self-employed persons who temporarily interrupt their professional activity to care for a relative may receive a monthly benefit (under certain conditions and for a limited period). In the event of a complete interruption of professional activity and the receipt of benefits for three consecutive months, the person is exempted from paying social security contributions, while maintaining his or her social security rights. This right to exemption is automatically verified by the self-employed person's social security fund.

Germany

In the statutory pension insurance, the so-called 'application principle' applies. This is defined by law and means that benefits are generally only paid on application. There are only a few exceptions to this principle, e.g. the payment of a standard old-age pension after the standard retirement age in exceptional cases following a pension due to reduced earning capacity. A change in entitlement to a survivor's pension after a certain age is also automatically taken into account, both for the self-employed and for employees (Hanesch 2022)

France

The Stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté, in place between 2018 and 2022, led to the development of mining techniques to identify individuals and households who could be entitled to social benefits from the linked administrative data. A data mining model has been developed for two benefits: the Prime d'activité (an in-work benefit for low-wage workers) and the Allocation de soutien familial (a lone parent benefit). For the Prime d'activité, 9.7% of the identified and contacted potential beneficiaries requested the benefit in 2019; in 2020, this percentage dropped to 7.5% and to 5.5% in 2021, as many potential beneficiaries had already been contacted in previous years (France Stratégie, 2022). For the Allocation de soutien familial, as of November 2021, nearly 49,000 people had been contacted by phone, and 10,800 through text message. Available data suggests that around 6.8% of those contacted by phone have claimed the benefit (France Stratégie, 2022).

Ireland

Ireland's Roadmap for Social Inclusion was launched in 2020 with three main goals: reducing poverty, preventing the risk of poverty, and making Ireland a leader in social inclusion within the European Union by 2025. The strategy includes quantitative targets and indicators sourced from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey, as well as Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO). Broader targets related to income distribution, housing quality, and education are also part of the strategy. To tackle non-take-up, Ireland has invested significantly in a traditional, probabilistic method which uses de-identified survey and administrative data to identify gaps in coverage and prioritises certain vulnerable groups or regions for social protection outreach (Department of Social Protection, 2023).

Lithuania

Lithuania combines survey and administrative data to create a ranked index of municipalities based on outcomes like poverty. A national strategy based on de-identified data offers certain advantages, including mitigating data privacy concerns and providing reliable information on inequalities between groups or areas. This helps address unequal enrolment in key social programmes. While this method can help identify people not yet included in the system, barriers such as lack of information, complexity, transaction costs, and social stigma may still prevent eligible individuals from applying or renewing their enrolment (Frey et al., 2024). Lithuania's Single Person's Benefit has been supporting pensioners and people with disabilities since July 2021. Initially, more than half of the 60,000 eligible people missed out due to lack of awareness or difficulties in applying. An awareness campaign resulted in applications from ineligible people, but many eligible people were still not being reached. To address this, SoDra developed software to identify eligible people based on marital status and automated payments. Now 230,000 people are receiving the benefit (Zitikytė, 2023 cited in ISSA 2023).

Poland

An example of the automation of the application and granting of benefits is the administration of benefits under the Family Support Programme (500+, 300+, Family Care Capital and co-financing of kindergarten fees). Applications for these benefits can only be submitted electronically, their processing is mainly automated and payments are only made to a bank account. Applications for these benefits can be made via several platforms, including mobile phone applications. The aim of automating the granting and payment of allowances is to streamline and speed up the performance of tasks that the Department is required by law to carry out in relation to customers claiming benefits. (Schoukens et al. unpublished).

4. Improving the monitoring of workers' access to social protection through specific tools, integrated data systems and digital solutions

This section focuses on specific tools that Member States have elaborated to improve monitoring of access to social protection. These include improving monitoring through specific tools, integrated data systems and digital solutions.

4.1. Improving monitoring through data integration and digital solutions.

Several countries have been enhancing their social protection frameworks by digitalising the identification and enrolment process for potential beneficiaries using linked datasets and social registries, thus improving data integration, and leading to the establishment of centralised databases and communication channels across social protection branches and administrative units. As mentioned in the ISSA (2024) data exchange is being leveraged to gain further insight about members, identify target populations, expand coverage, and continue to improve service delivery. These systems may function as 'crossroads of databases,' serving as one-stop administration platforms that collect, monitor, and share data with all relevant social protection institutions. Better interconnection among different units could encourage the development of early warning systems for individuals at risk of poverty, helping to inform them of their situation and the available benefits and services.

Such integrated systems are also valuable in ensuring the transferability of entitlements across programmes and regions. Box 6 demonstrates the value of integrated data systems that enable cross-sector collaboration for improved monitoring and streamlined social protection processes (Box 5).

Box 5: Examples of recent policies focused on improving monitoring through data integration

Belgium

The Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS) plays a central role in reducing the administrative burden for socially insured people and companies. The CBSS has developed an electronic network linking the various social security institutions with one another. The network currently connects 3,000 social protection institutions. A social security institution that needs specific data regarding a socially insured person or company to execute its assignment will submit an electronic application to the CBSS. If the requested data is already available at another social security institution, it will be transferred to them without them needing to write to the socially insured person or the company. The CBSS also contributes to ensure that, as far as possible, social rights are granted automatically, without the beneficiaries needing to request them (Van Limberghen et al., 2020).

Bulgaria

The interoperability of databases for tracking and paying healthcare benefits – via common protocols through which databases exchange and link information – has improved, eliminating the need for users to collect and retain documents as proof of healthcare and old-age benefit payments. Integrated information systems now generate the necessary data by connecting social security, health, and tax administrations (European Commission, 2023).

France

The Stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté, in place between 2018 and 2022, proposed to simplify benefit access by strengthening data exchanges across public agencies, specifically information on the monthly incomes of employees (France Stratégie, 2022).

Moreover, During the COVID-19 pandemic, the French national fund URSSAF implemented a unified data exchange system to support the self-employed. This model improved coordination between social security institutions, enabling them to better identify needs and extend coverage to the self-employed and other hard-to-reach groups (ISSA 2024).

Lithuania

The State Social Insurance Fund Board (SSIFB) created an electronic data exchange system to identify and analyse target groups (ISSA 2024).

The Netherlands

The Social Insurance Bank (SVB) developed a collaborative data exchange model to address the under-utilisation of income support supplements, while ensuring compliance with data protection laws (ISSA 2024).

Portugal

The Informatics Institute launched a web-based portal for the creative sector through a multi-stakeholder data exchange system (ISSA 2024).

Portugal has implemented several strategies and measures to ensure the collection of reliable data on access to social protection. Key initiatives include:

- *National Data Strategy: Portugal's National Data Strategy aligns with the European Data Strategy, aiming to create a secure and accessible data ecosystem. This strategy focuses on enhancing data quality and interoperability, which is crucial for reliable data collection in social protection.*
- *Public Administration Open Data Portal: This portal provides access to a wide range of datasets, including those related to social protection.*
- *Open Data Initiatives: The strategy emphasizes the importance of open data and the reuse of public sector information. This is facilitated through the open data portal, Portaldados.gov, which provides access to a wide range of data from various public bodies.*
- *Interoperability and Data Sharing: The strategy focuses on ensuring interoperability and secure data sharing across different sectors. This is crucial for creating new services and products, both within Portugal and across borders.*
- *Integrated Social Support Network (RASI): RASI connects different social support services, enabling better coordination and data sharing among agencies. This helps in providing comprehensive support to vulnerable populations. (Pre-workshop survey 2024).*

Public sector institutions increasingly rely on digital solutions for data production and collection. This is linked to the development of policy and practices on access to information on and simplification of social protection benefits (e.g. (automated) application processes). We include examples of the improvement of monitoring through digitalisation in five European countries (CY, FI, LT, SI, SK). Box 6 illustrates how digitalisation is being used in some Member States to improve the efficiency of monitoring and simplify access to social protection benefits.

Box 6: Examples of recent policies focused on improving monitoring through digital solutions

Cyprus

An all-encompassing reform of the Social Insurance Services (SIS) is on-going. The reform has been outlined in the Cyprus National Plan linked to the 2019 Council Recommendation and is supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility. It includes better access to information, and the simplification of legislation. One of the highlights of the reform is the digitalisation of benefit applications, as well as the further development of the payment system for the SIS ('SISnet'), which provides users with the opportunity to pay contributions electronically (users register online with the system). This would vastly improve the availability of data on workers' access, as registration is compulsory for both employers and the self-employed (Koutsampelas et al., 2022). According to the Cypriot Recovery and Resilience Plan this is planned to be implemented by 2026.

Lithuania

Lithuania has been investing in digitalisation to enhance the transparency and coordination between institutions involved in social protection. The Sodra system, Lithuania's social insurance system, has played a critical role in this digital transformation by improving data collection on non-standard employment and on the self-employed. This data allows for a more effective monitoring of the impact of social reforms and better coordination between social insurance institutions (Spasova et al., 2023).

Slovenia

In Slovenia, in 2023, the Information System of Centres for Social Work began to automatically collect data on the payment of social contributions by the self-employed and farmers (Spasova et al., 2023).

Spain

The “Tarjeta Social Digital” (Social Digital Card) is a new information system that integrates economic social benefits managed by Public Administrations (State, Autonomous Communities and Local Entities), whether they are basic or complementary pensions, contributory, non-contributory or welfare benefits, temporary benefits such as temporary disability subsidies, birth and childcare, risk during pregnancy and breastfeeding, family protection, minimum vital income, integration incomes, or one-time payments, in short, any social benefit aimed at individuals or families.

It allows each person to have updated information about the benefits and aids they receive or have received and to download it from their device with all security and confidentiality guarantees. For administrations, as information providers and system users, the Digital Social Card offers a complete view of the social protection each citizen receives. In this sense, the management and control of economic benefits and aids will be more agile and secure. For public authorities, it will facilitate decision-making in the design of social policies (Pre-workshop survey 2024).

Nevertheless, efforts to digitalise and integrate data are only as strong as the extent to which data are reported. Box 7 highlights policies that describe efforts to enforce labour law which in several cases is accompanied by strengthened data reporting practices to improve transparency and accountability in access to social protection.

Box 7: Examples of recent policies focused on improving data reporting

Germany

Starting January 1, 2022, employers of short-term employees are required to report their health insurance status to ensure proper coverage. For reporting periods from this date onward, when registering short-term employees, employers must specify whether the employee is covered by statutory or private health insurance (“Seasonal Workers.” insurance.de accessed October 23, 2024).

Poland

As of January 1, 2021, Poland implemented a requirement to notify the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) about contracts for specific work. This notification is done through the ZUS RUD form (notification of a contract for specific work), where the obligated party enters both their own and the contractor's details, along with information about the contract, including the start and end dates and the subject of the contract. The form can be submitted electronically via the ZUS Electronic Services Platform (PUE ZUS) or in paper format. ZUS records these forms in a register of contracts for specific work and publishes annual reports detailing, among other things, the number of such contracts concluded. The case of Poland is important to note, as it shows that better data reporting does not have to be entirely linked to digitalisation (Republic of Poland, 2021).

Chile

While most examples in this paper focus on EU Member States, it is worth also quoting one non-EU country example, in that case, from Chile. Created in 2016, the Registro

Social de Hogares is a centralised database containing socio-economic data on households with the purpose of determining their eligibility for social benefits. It contains both self-reported data (by households) on different socio-economic conditions, as well as administrative data provided by several ministries and other government agencies. These data form the basis for calculating the Socio-economic Qualification, a socio-economic indicator at the household level that determines the eligibility of each household for specific social benefits (OECD 2024). Enrollment in the Registro Social de Hogares is voluntary. This can be done electronically using a personal identification number issued by the Civil Registry, or in person: offices of the Registro Social de Hogares exist in all Chilean municipalities. Outreach workers may also visit the household; this tends to happen in remote communities (e.g. island communities) by municipal workers trying to help local residents access national benefits (OECD, 2024).

4.2. Institutionalising the monitoring of workers' access to social protection

Institutional cooperation plays a vital role in supporting comprehensive monitoring and responsiveness within social protection systems. Box 8 and Box 9 illustrate respectively, good practices from Belgium and France.

Box 8: Example of recent policies improving monitoring through institutional synergy

Belgium

Under the name "Working Group Social Impact Covid-19 (GT SIC)" several federal institutions (including from the FPS Social Security, FPS Employment, and the PPS Social Integration, as well as representatives from Public Social Security Institutions (IPSS), Sigedis, Statbel, the National Bank of Belgium, and the Federal Planning Bureau) launched, in April 2020, at the initiative of the federal crisis, a monitoring system to assess the social and employment impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive overview of developments in these areas. This monitoring has continued since then, also tracking the effects of the Ukrainian crisis and the energy crisis. Given the importance of maintaining a current understanding of the social situation, even outside of acute crises, this monitoring has continued under the new name "Working Group Social Impact Crises" (GT SIC). The monitoring results are summarised in a report which is updated every three months ("Monitoring van de Sociale Impact Tijdens Crisissituaties in België." Federale Overheidsdienst - Sociale Zekerheid, accessed October 23, 2024).

Box 9: Examples of recent policies improving monitoring through the creation of new institutions

France

Recent regulatory change in France has promoted representation and social dialogue in the sectors of ride-hailing (VTC) and delivery. In these two sectors, which account for nearly 120,000 workers, the ordinance grants workers the right to elect their representatives. The first national election took place in May 2022. The ordinance also establishes the Authority for Social Relations in Employment Platforms (ARPE), a public administrative body tasked with regulating social dialogue between platforms and self-employed workers, and monitoring self-employed workers' access to social protection (<https://www.arpe.gouv.fr/>).

5. Conclusion: possible ways forward at EU and national levels

This report has highlighted the different approaches taken by EU Member States to improve the monitoring of access to social protection. Monitoring frameworks vary, but generally aim to improve data quality, facilitate better monitoring and support reforms to address coverage gaps.

The report presents examples of Member States that have implemented different types of data monitoring strategies to assess how social protection reforms affect different segments of the labour force, in particular non-standard workers and the self-employed. Other examples include the development of targeted data collection procedures to measure coverage rates and eligibility for specific benefits, often including detailed breakdowns by type of employment, gender or age. In addition, administrative data sources, surveys and performance indicators such as take-up rates and poverty measures are increasingly being integrated to provide a clearer picture of how well social protection is reaching those in need.

To improve data collection on social protection in the EU, we make suggestions to both national and EU levels, based on the practices described in this report:

Beyond current work to improve the EU monitoring framework, the EU could further support efforts to improve data collection methods and help Member States to obtain more accurate and comprehensive insights on social protection coverage, in particular for non-standard and the self-employed (see also Schoukens et al. 20-23). Indeed, in line with Article 17 of the 2019 Recommendation, which encourages national statistical authorities in the EU to make greater use of administrative data, the EU can promote a systematic and structured approach to data collection, together with standardised definitions when possible, which are essential to facilitate reliable cross-country comparisons and effective monitoring. This approach could improve assessments of the coverage and adequacy of social protection, in particular for vulnerable groups. Challenges also include the accurate collection of self-reported income for the self-employed and ensuring effective access to benefits for non-standard workers. Finally, administrative social benefit receipt is sometimes only reported per year (i.e. people who at any point in the year received the benefit) or for instance at a specific point/day or at any point during a specific month in the year. The difference can be large, and also partly explains differences between administrative data and EU-LFS/SILC (or, more generally, survey)-based estimates (Eurofound 2024). There, is therefore, need to pay a specific attention so such issues.

Promote microsimulation modelling to analyse the adequacy and effectiveness of coverage. Expanding the use of microsimulation models, in particular through tax-benefit models such as EUROMOD, could provide valuable insights into the adequacy of income

replacement benefits. Microsimulations allow dynamic testing of adjustments to social protection systems and help to project the impact of potential reforms, taking into account behavioural responses. This approach is particularly useful for assessing the adequacy of benefits for representative households and vulnerable groups, such as quasi-jobless households.

Institutional cooperation within a country can play a central role in monitoring efforts.

By linking social protection, tax and health systems, countries can better assess and track coverage and ensure that data is shared effectively between agencies (see also Spasova et al. 20-22). Examples of national coordination initiatives show how integrated data systems allow comprehensive tracking of social outcomes, facilitating timely updates on social protection performance and identifying areas for reform.

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