



Measuring gaps in social citizenship in Europe: How do we capture diversity?

András Gábos, Zsófia Tomka and István György Tóth
EUROSHIP POLICY BRIEF No. 2 - February 2022

INTRODUCTION

The EUROSHIP project (2020-2023) aims to provide an original and gender-sensitive assessment of the current gaps in social protection against poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Through the involvement of national and European stakeholders, EUROSHIP develops policy recommendations on how to strengthen social citizenship at the national and EU levels. The research results will support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The work package on 'Mapping gaps in social citizenship: diversity and needs for new indicators' critically assesses the adequacy and suitability of existing EU social indicators and describes developments in poverty and social exclusion across Europe. Three papers have been produced so far within the work package: a state-of-the-art review on the existing data infrastructure and indicators, a mapping of poverty from a pan-European perspective and a third one suggesting two alternative approaches, the dashboard and the multidimensional composite index ones, to improve the monitoring of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, specifically the Social Scoreboard. This policy brief summarizes our main findings regarding the gaps in the measurement of diversity and provides recommendation on improving monitoring in the field.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870698. The opinions published in this deliverable only reflect the authors' view. The Agency and the Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Gaps in existing data infrastructure and indicators

There is a large data and monitoring infrastructure in place supporting both national and EU level policy making with respect to poverty and social exclusion. There are, however, important gaps in this infrastructure that represents a bottleneck in the mapping of diversity in this field across Europe. In other words, the reliability of poverty estimates (and other related measures) by main socio-demographic characteristics is often hampered by low sample sizes in main population surveys. In our analysis ([Gábos et al. 2021](#)), we relied both on EU-SILC (for the indicators at-risk-of-poverty rate, severe material deprivation rate, living in very low work intensity household rate, at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, housing deprivation rate and self-reported unmet need for medical care) and on EU-LFS (for the NEET rate, unemployment rate, and part-time employment rate) as main data sources for the Social Scoreboard. We identified the following problems.

- There are vulnerable groups for which indicator estimates are mostly reliable (e.g. persons with low education and persons with disabilities/impairment), while for others, these estimates are less reliable (e.g. migrants and persons with migrant background) and largely country-dependent.
- Involving further breakdowns to reflect on intersectionality aggravates these problems.
- Most of the indicators based on EU-SILC are reliable across groups. However, the severe housing deprivation rate is unreliable in all cases, also because it includes a further breakdown into owners and tenants. The reliability of the unmet need for medical care rate largely depends on the size of the subgroup.
- Overall, one may also note that despite similarities, the EU-LFS has higher sample sizes and therefore, there are less problems when the reliability of indicators is concerned.
- The experiences of the national statistical offices largely supported the results of the statistical analysis. Measures to overcome the problems posed by the sample size are on the table in some countries. In both Germany and Spain a considerable increase of the sample size is either already implemented (Germany) or is an ongoing process (Spain).

Combining relative and absolute concepts of poverty: the pan-European at-risk-of-poverty rate

Further, we provided a quantitative analysis of poverty and social exclusion across the members of the European Union (as well as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Serbia, where available) and across time (from 2005 to 2017), within the context defined by the security dimension of the social citizenship concept ([Gábos, Tomka and Tóth 2021](#)). The economic security of households and individuals were benchmarked both against national and European poverty thresholds, while the main value added of the analysis relates to the latter. In addition, social group characteristics, like sex or educational attainment, were also considered. The results of our analysis can be summarized as follows.

- The use of the pan-European poverty line illustrates the huge differences in standards of living across the member states (mainly between East/South and West/North).
- There is a large discrepancy between the variance of the pan-European at-risk-of-poverty rate when compared to the national indicator. While the latter varies between 10 and 30 percent across member states in 2017, the pan-European values span from 1 percent (Switzerland) to 92 percent (Romania).
- At the national level, poverty rates for women tend to be higher than for men and for low-educated people than for the highly educated. Discrepancies by sex and education are less significant when it comes to poverty rates at the pan-European level.

Overall, we could observe the effects of the Great Recession on the trends in median income and the at-risk-of-poverty rate. There was a convergence in median incomes between 2005 and 2017, which was interrupted, but overall not reversed by the crisis.

The value added of alternative methods to monitor the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) constitutes a strategic asset for the future of the European Union. To foster upward social convergence is one of the main opportunities to build a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for the EU. The social and economic consequences of the COVID pandemic add further unknowns to this already complex scenario. The effective monitoring of the implementation of the EPSR is thus a relevant issue from both a scientific and a practical/political point of view. Our third paper ([Biggeri et al. 2022](#)) contributed to the debate on how to effectively promote the monitoring of the EPSR by analysing the Social Scoreboard from two main point of views: firstly, by proposing strategies to improve it and secondly, by exploring the possibility of elaborating a composite indicator starting from the indicators of the existing scoreboard.

The development of a composite indicator (the European Social Rights Indicator or ESRI) was based on the measures of the Social Scoreboard. The ESRI allowed us to perform over-time and cross-country comparisons according to a single synthetic score. This is particularly interesting in dealing with the issue of upward social convergence of the European Union. Based on this measure, we found divergent trajectories of EU countries after the 2008 recession, with Southern European countries presenting a slower and less effective recovery.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These three papers produced evidence and new knowledge to further improve the existing data infrastructure and monitoring tools in the field of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. Our findings may help to formulate better policy options, both at the national and the EU level. Our recommendations include:

1. *The existing data infrastructure needs further improvement in order to enhance the measurement of diversity across social groups.*

- Monitoring the results of experiences based on increased sample sizes and alternative data collection techniques in some member states would be of great importance and would benefit the coordination of the European Statistical System.
- One of the most important shortcomings of the underlying data is their poor coverage at the NUTS-2 regional level. Existing microdata do not allow for a comprehensive analysis at the regional level, which would be crucial in capturing regional resilience and understanding the role of policies at this level.

2. *The measurement of different dimensions of social citizenship is still a challenge we face.* Accordingly, further research should aim to improve indicator development in this field. Poverty measurement and choices we make with respect to the income-based poverty indicators may strongly influence robustness, cross-country results and as such, policy conclusions in a European frame. The most important among these is the choice of equivalence scales, but the same holds for the poverty threshold itself. Related to the latter, a focus on the subjective assessment of resources and their adequacy may extend measurement towards the 'influence' dimension of social citizenship, as people could assess and report themselves on their household's ability and needs to make ends meet.

3. *The Social Scoreboard, as the main tool to monitor the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the evolution of social trends in general, needs further improvement in several respects.*

- There is a lack of indicators measuring inequality in outcomes. Recently, the Joint Research Centre published a report proposing the Multidimensional Inequality Monitoring Framework (EU MIMF) which is aimed at broadening and deepening the scope of the Social Scoreboard.
- Social policy indicators are direct measures of the role of welfare states in the 'security' and the 'autonomy' domains of the social citizenship concept. The presence of these indicators in the current scoreboard is very restricted and most of them are input measures.

- Adopting a pan-European approach may support EU-level decision-making in closing gaps in social citizenship. However, there is no measure in the Social Scoreboard which examines the incidence of poverty on a European level (as if the European Union was a single society).
- Child-specific indicators need to be improved and there is a lack of quality of work measures.
- The ability of the Social Scoreboard to describe the actual access to social rights for vulnerable groups should be strengthened, also in the light of the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable persons.

4. A *multidimensional composite indicator*, called European Social Rights Indicator (ESRI) to measure the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights *has been proposed*.

- Considering the flexibility of the approach, the ESRI would benefit from the improvements of the Social Scoreboard, as detailed above. A second version of the ESRI (called ESRI+) was elaborated to assess for possible improvements by including child-specific and disability-specific indicators (coherently with the newly released version of the scoreboard). In a similar way, other measures could easily be included in a new version of the ESRI.
- Further developments of the ESRI are linked to the possibility of disaggregating it by regions (i.e. computing a NUTS-2 level ESRI) and by vulnerable groups. However, as already discussed above, this is constrained by data availability.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Closing gaps in social citizenship: New tools to foster social resilience in Europe (EUROSHIP)
COORDINATOR	OsloMet - Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
CONSORTIUM	OsloMet - Oslo Metropolitan University (coordinator), Norway University of Milan, Italy University of Tallinn, Estonia University of Hamburg, Germany TÁRKI Social Research Institute, Hungary University of Florence, Italy Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain Swiss Paraplegic Research, Switzerland University of Sussex, Business School, UK Social Platform, Belgium

FUNDING SCHEME	Funded by European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under Grant Agreement No. 870698
DURATION	February 2020 – July 2023 (42 Months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: EUR 3 Mill.
TWITTER	@EUROSHIP_EU
WEBSITE	www.euroship-research.eu
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Rune HALVORSEN (Scientific coordinator), OsloMet -Oslo Metropolitan University, rune.halvorsen@oslomet.no

