Workshop: Measuring what matters: Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing metrics in the European Pillar of Social Rights Scoreboard

June 3rd, 9:30 – 11:30
Joint Research Centre Policy Lab CDMA Building
21 Rue du Champ de Mars / Marsveldstraat 21, B-1050 Brussels

Building economies that deliver wellbeing for all—now and in the future—requires complex tools. In this context, MERGE, a Horizon Europe-funded project, aims to foster science-policy exchange through developing indicators and models to strengthen sustainable and inclusive wellbeing policies.

Through its policy stream, led by ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies and the European Policy Centre (EPC), MERGE conducts "policy deep dives"[1] to analyse how a holistic set of metrics can enhance key EU policies. Among these is the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), its current and future Action Plans and the supporting Social Scoreboard.

At a time when political priorities are evolving, and social concerns risk being sidelined, the importance of reinforcing the social dimension of the EU cannot be overstated. While various efforts have been made to advance a more inclusive Europe, 1 in 5 Europeans remains at risk of poverty and social exclusion[2], highlighting persistent social and economic disparities.

In the context of the upcoming EPSR review, this workshop brings together EU policymakers and experts to discuss how the EPSR can promote sustainable and inclusive wellbeing, and how SIW indicators can be better integrated into monitoring frameworks such as the Social Scoreboard.

The workshop discussions will feed into the further development of future MERGE project work packages, in particular, the development of the case studies and a training programme for the use of a policy design toolbox.

Agenda:

9:20-9.30	Coffee + Welcome
9:30-09:40	MERGE presentation: “setting the scene”.
09:40-09:55	Impulse statements
09:55 – 10:25	Breakout exercise: identifying priorities for review of EPSR

[1] Other selected policies include: the EU budget, the European Green Deal, the European Semester, Competitiveness, and Governance.
[2] Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion&oldid=584082

10:25- 10:35	Summary of the results
10:35 – 11:05	Breakout exercise: SIW and the Social Scoreboard.
11:05-11:15	Discussion of results
11:15 – 11:30	Closing remarks

Workshop discussion

The EPSR and its Action Plan, set to be renewed at the end of the year, outline concrete initiatives for Member States to achieve the 20 Principles of the Pillar aimed at fostering fairer labour markets, equal opportunities and social protection and inclusion. However, the current monitoring system, the Social Scoreboard, presents some gaps in integrating SIW indicators effectively.

The workshop offers an opportunity not only to assess the extent to which the current Action Plan and Social Scoreboard are underpinned by sustainable and inclusive wellbeing (SIW) but also to look ahead and explore what additional measures are needed to ensure that the revised Action Plan effectively advances a sustainable and inclusive Europe. This includes identifying how a more holistic and forward-looking set of SIW metrics can be better integrated into the governance of the EPSR, both to monitor progress and to guide policymaking in line with its ambitions.

Challenges to achieving sustainable and inclusive wellbeing with the EPSR and Social Scoreboard:

- **Insufficient alignment between the Social Scoreboard indicators and EPSR principles**

One of the most significant limitations of the current monitoring framework is its inability to capture all 20 principles of the EPSR comprehensively. While the indicators in the Social Scoreboard are organised according to the Pillar's three thematic chapters, namely equal opportunities, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion remain substantial gaps, with several principles lacking dedicated or adequate headlines and secondary indicators to effectively track progress and implementation.

- **Absence of disaggregated data**

The current monitoring framework faces other limitations. These include a lack of disaggregated data, especially by gender, age, ethnicity and other socio-economic characteristics. It also presents a limited capacity to capture the multidimensional nature of social rights. As a result, while the Scoreboard plays a valuable role in steering EU social policy, it still falls short in providing a f comprehensive and actionable assessment of progress toward a more social Europe.

Framing questions:

1. What needs to be taken into account in the upcoming review of the European Pillar of Social Rights to further advance sustainable and inclusive wellbeing?

2. How can the use of the Social Scoreboard and its indicators be improved within governance frameworks such as the European Semester and the social convergence framework to better measure progress in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and advance sustainable and inclusive wellbeing?

Background: European Pillar of Social Rights and the action plan

Launched in 2017, the EPSR represents a cornerstone of the EU's dedication to fostering social inclusion and fairness throughout its Member States. To operationalise the principles of the EPSR, the European Commission launched the first Action Plan in 2021. The plan outlines concrete targets for 2030, such as ensuring that at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 is employed, 60% of adults participate in annual training, and the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is reduced by at least 15 million, including 5 million children. The plan supports a people-centred recovery following the COVID-19 crisis, aiming to strengthen inclusive growth and social cohesion. However, the implementation of the principles of the EPSR as well as the Action Plan remains uneven across Member States, with disparities in both commitment and capacity to deliver on the outlined objectives and targets.

Monitoring the EPSR: The Social Scoreboard

The Social Scoreboard serves as the primary tool for monitoring the implementation of the EPSR. It tracks performance using a set of quantitative headline and secondary indicators linked to most of EPSR principles, allowing for comparisons between countries and over time. The scoreboard exists within the broader European Semester framework supported by annual Country Reports, Joint Employment Reports, medium-term fiscal structural plans and annual progress reports. Together, these instruments allow for a coordinated and structured approach to social policy monitoring across the EU. Moreover, initiatives such as the EPSR Action Plan have added political momentum by setting concrete targets, further aligning EU funding mechanisms such as European Social Fund Plus, with the goals of the EPSR. In parallel, the integration of the Social Convergence Framework into the European Semester has reinforced the role of social indicators in the EU's economic governance, supporting upward convergence among Member States on key social priorities. Together, these developments signal a growing recognition that social progress must be systematically measured and mainstreamed across EU policymaking. Despite this institutional progress, translating the EPSR into tangible improvements on the ground remains uneven and hindered by structural challenges in data collection and policy implementation.

Shortcomings of the Social Scoreboard

The current monitoring framework faces several limitations. These include a lack of disaggregated data (especially by gender, age, and other socio-economic characteristics), insufficient alignment

between indicators and EPSR principles, and limited capacity to capture the multidimensional nature of social rights, further demonstrated in the assessment frameworks at MS level. Other limitations lie in how the Social Scoreboard indicators are used within the new Social Convergence Framework, particularly the exclusive focus on headline indicators and the methodology applied in the first stage assessment to detect risks to upward social convergence.

Additionally, within the European Semester, the reliance on EU averages rather than on quantitative or qualitative targets in the Joint Employment Reports fails to ensure sufficient ambition or foster upward social convergence. While the Scoreboard plays a valuable role in steering EU social policy and while some improvements have been made it still falls short in providing a fully comprehensive and actionable assessment of progress toward a more social Europe. Some EPSR principles lack corresponding indicators in the Scoreboard. As displayed in Table 1, there's a clear reference to the three chapters of the Pillar and to the corresponding SDGs goals, but not to all 20 principles. For instance, Principle 3 on equal opportunities is inadequately covered, with indicators focusing primarily on skills and income inequality, while neglecting issues such as discrimination. Similarly, in the second chapter on fair working conditions, the current set of indicators used fail to capture key aspects of quality employment, such as work-life balance, access to trade union membership and collective bargaining, and active support employment, further stepping back from sustainable and inclusive wellbeing.[3]

[3] Social Platform, Open letter on an ambitious and comprehensive revision of the Social Scoreboard.

	Headline indicators	Secondary indicators	SDG
Equal opportunities	Adult participation in learning during the last 12 months** Share of early leavers from education and training Individuals' level of digital skills Youth NEET rate (15—29) Gender employment gap Income quintile ratio (S80/S20)	Tertiary education attainment Underachievement in education (including in digital skills**) Participation of low-qualified adults in learning** Share of unemployed adults with a recent learning experience** Gap in underachievement between the bottom and top quarter of the socio-economic index (PISA)** Gender gap in part-time employment Gender pay gap in unadjusted form Income share of the bottom 40% earners (SDG)**	4. Quality education 5. Gender equality 10. Reduced inequalities
Fair working conditions	Employment rate Unemployment rate Long-term unemployment rate GDHI per capita growth	Activity rate Youth unemployment rate Employment in current job by duration Transition rates from temporary to permanent contracts Share of involuntary temporary employees** Fatal accidents at work per 100,000 workers (SDG)** In-work-at-risk-of-poverty rate	8. Decent work and economic growth
Social protection and inclusion	At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE) At-risk-of-poverty rate or exclusion for children (0—17)** Impact of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction Disability employment gap** Housing cost overburden** Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare Self-reported unmet need for medical care	At-risk-of-poverty rate (AROP) Severe material and social deprivation rate (SMSD) Persons living in a household with a very low work intensity Severe housing deprivation (owner and tenant) Median at-risk of poverty gap** Benefit recipients rate [share of individuals aged 18—59 receiving any social benefits (other than old-age) among the population at-risk-of-poverty]** Total social expenditure by function (% of GDP): Social protection, healthcare, education, long-term care** Coverage of unemployment benefits [among short-term unemployed]** Coverage of long-term care needs** Aggregate replacement ratio for pensions Share of the population unable to keep home adequately warm (SDG)** Connectivity dimension of the Digital Economy and Society Index Children from age 3 to mandatory primary school age in formal childcare** Out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare Healthy life years at age 65: Women and men Standardised preventable and treatable mortality (SDG)**	1. No poverty 3. Good health and well-being

** New indicator compared to current version of the Scoreboard (in brackets the framework where it is currently used)

Note - breakdowns to the social scoreboard indicators by age group, gender, country of birth, disability status will be used for complementing the analysis where relevant.

Table 1: Social Scoreboard's Indicators

Additionally, Principle 8 on social dialogue lacks a corresponding indicator, despite proposals to measure participative management practices in enterprises. Likewise, Principle 19 on housing and assistance for the homeless is inadequately represented through a limited indicator for housing cost overburden, with no insight into homelessness or housing exclusion. Similar gaps are evident in indicators related to disability rights, which focus solely on the employment gap while overlooking broader systemic barriers. Finally, CSOs have pointed to the Scoreboard's limited capacity to capture the multifaceted nature of social exclusion, which is shaped by interlinked and compounding factors such as health, education, poverty, and discrimination.

Further methodological and conceptual limitations have also been identified.[4] One of the main concerns is the absence of disaggregated data by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status. This lack of granularity undermines the ability to assess the differentiated impacts of social policies on specific population groups, especially those in vulnerable or marginalised situations. For instance, the Scoreboard currently fails to capture the realities of the Roma population and does not align with the EU's anti-racism action plan or its broader equality data agenda on people with disabilities and other minorities.

Remaining and future challenges

Moving forward, the EU's social monitoring framework must evolve to reflect a more comprehensive, inclusive and multifaceted understanding of wellbeing. This would involve addressing current gaps in the Social Scoreboard and incorporating further headline and secondary indicators, providing a fuller picture of Member States' efforts to implement social rights. Furthermore, many of the existing indicators suffer from time lags, high volatility, and limited comparability across countries. For example, the AROPE rate (At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion), while widely used, is only available after a significant delay and reflects relative rather than absolute poverty, which is an outcome indicator that partly relies on subjective information. Similarly, indicators such as "not in education, employment or training (NEET)" and "youth unemployment rates" can be misleading due to seasonal fluctuations and demographic shifts. The current fragmentation in national data collection methods highlights the urgent need for harmonised, timely and comparable data across the EU. Additionally, there is a noticeable bias in current monitoring tools and policy initiatives, with a stark focus on employment and skill mirrored in the Social Scoreboard itself. For instance, the only indicator related to the inclusion of people with disabilities assesses their integration solely through the lens of employment. More broadly, social exclusion is often framed primarily as exclusion from the labour

[4] Grossi, T., Rayner, L., Brady, D., Dervishi, X. (2024). *The social pillar and the future of the EU social agenda.* The Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Social Platform, AK Europa and Solidar.

market, overlooking other critical dimensions such as access to housing, healthcare, education, and civic participation.[5]

Sustainable and inclusive wellbeing indicators

To strengthen the Social Scoreboard's capacity to guide the implementation of the EPSR, there is a pressing need to better integrate Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing (SIW) indicators into its framework. Expanding the Scoreboard to include such indicators would allow for a more holistic assessment of social progress and the lived experiences of people across the EU. Moreover, embedding sustainability into social monitoring would help align the EPSR with the Union's climate goals and the just green transition, ensuring that social justice remains at the core of environmental, climate and importantly economic policy. Inclusivity must also be central: wellbeing indicators should be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and other relevant characteristics, enabling the identification of structural inequalities and intersectional vulnerabilities.

By measuring long-term impacts on people, communities, and the environment, Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing (SIW) metrics can enhance policy coherence and support a just transition.

MERGE research shows increasing convergence around three key dimensions: wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability[6] as 'Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing' becomes a new common ground for beyond GDP metrics, policies, and models[7].

Key dimensions include:

Current Wellbeing – Ensuring current quality of life (e.g., access to social and affordable housing, quality healthcare and social services, access to childcare and elderly services, work-life balance, mental health support).

Future wellbeing (sustainability) – Securing future wellbeing (e.g.., investment in social infrastructures like education and care system, support young people in transition into adulthood, lifelong learning).

Inclusion (Limiting wellbeing inequalities for current and future generations) – Reducing inequalities (e.g., equal access to education and healthcare services, inclusion of persons with disabilities, reduction of gender inequalities, gender pay gap, address territorial disparities).

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[5] Dawson M. (2018) New governance and the displacement of social Europe: the case of the European Semester, European Constitutional Law Review, 14 (1), 191-209

[6] Rum, I., Hoekstra, R., Jensen, A., Eastoe, J., Kubiszewski, I., Constanza, R., Kaufmann, R. & Biggeri, M. (2024). *Are Beyond-GDP metrics converging? Consolidation of the measurement of sustainable and inclusive wellbeing.* The MERGE project.

[7] Benczur, P., Boskovic, A., Cariboni, J., Chevallier, R., Le, B. J., Sandor, A.-M., & Zec, S. (2024, July 1). *Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing, the road forward.* JRC Publications Repository. https://doi.org/10.2760/828060

MERGE

Measuring what matters – policy pathways to sustainable and inclusive wellbeing

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Funded by the European Union in the framework of the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement N° 101132524.

This work was funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant number 10092245, 10099476, 10112986].

Funded by the European Union

UK Research and Innovation