



ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

THE WORLD BANK MUST PROMOTE UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

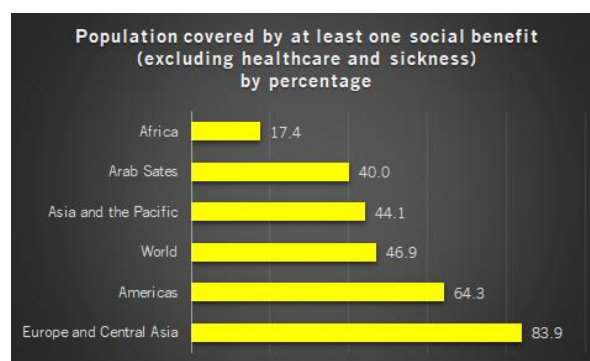
1. OVERVIEW

The multiple and overlapping crises in different parts of the world have resulted in loss of jobs, skyrocketing inflation, growing hunger, and increasing unrest on a global scale – all in a context in which billions of people have no access to social security measures such as family and child benefits and income support in case of unemployment, sickness, disability and older age.

Social security is a stand-alone human right recognized in Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and enshrined in a number of international human rights instruments.¹ It includes the right to access and maintain benefits to secure protection from a range of adverse circumstances, including a lack of work-related income, unaffordable healthcare, and insufficient family support especially for children and adult dependents.² The right to social security can be realized through a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory benefits, including social assistance. These could take the form of cash benefits, employment guarantee schemes, or exemptions from, or subsidies on the payment for essential services.

Generally speaking, there are two main approaches to providing social protection – ‘Poverty Targeting’ and ‘Universal Coverage’. Poverty targeting is a commonly used method by states to channel social assistance to groups deemed to be living in poverty or extreme poverty. However, this system faced significant criticism, as when put into practice, targeting based on narrow indicators of poverty often excludes people who should actually be covered, stigmatizes recipients, and involves higher administrative costs.³ In contrast, Universal Coverage or Universal Social

Protection is an approach that provides social security cover to all people – regardless of income – throughout the lifecycle including in childhood, during maternity/paternity, older age and during contingencies such as ill-health, loss of work, injury, and disability.⁴ The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be used to complement each other in a manner where poverty targeted schemes are used to supplement universal measures and where the targeting is part of deliberate steps to progressively achieve universal coverage.⁵



Source: International Labour Organization

The World Bank is among the largest institutional funders of social protection globally. As of March 2023, the Bank was providing USD 26 billion in financing for social protection and the creation of employment opportunities.⁶ In its overview of its work on social protection, the Bank states, “[t]he World Bank has a vision for universal social protection to ensure that all people have the support they need and that no individuals or groups are left behind. It is the cornerstone of inclusive social policy. Together with universal social protection programmes, targeted interventions play a valuable role in helping achieve universal protection.”⁷ Furthermore, in a joint statement with the ILO, the Bank has acknowledged that “[u]niversal coverage and access to social

¹ Cover Photo: A clothes line hangs in a building site in front of a large building in the City, 10 September 2022, Beirut, Lebanon. © Getty Images

² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 9. The right to social security is also enshrined in Article 5(e)(iv), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Article 26, Convention on the Rights of the Child; Article 28, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and in several Conventions of the International Labour Organization, in particular Convention 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security.

³ UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 19: The Right to Social Security (Art. 9), 4 February 2008, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/19.

⁴ See, for example, Shahra Razavi, “The case for universal social protection is more self-evident than ever”, 2 June 2020, Development Pathways, <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/blog/the-case-for-universal-social-protection-is-more-self-evident-than-ever>; Isabel Ortiz, “The Case for Universal Social Protection”, December 2018, IMF, Finance & Development, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2018/12/case-for-universal-social>.

protection-ortiz; Stephen Kidd and Diloá Athias, Hit and Miss: An Assessment of Targeting Effectiveness in Social Protection with Additional Analysis, June 2020, Development Pathways, Working Paper, <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Hit-and-miss-longreport.pdf>; and UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (UN Special Rapporteur on poverty), Report: The Role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Relation to Social Protection, 8 May 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/33.

⁴ ILO, Universal Social Protection 2030, <https://usp2030.org/#wh>

⁵ Shahra Razavi and others, “Building universal social protection systems for all: What role for targeting?”, 2 June 2022, <https://socialprotection.org/discover/blog/building-universal-social-protection-systems-all-what-role-targeting-0>

⁶ The World Bank In Social Protection, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/overview> (accessed on 28 August 2023), “Overview”.

⁷ The World Bank In Social Protection, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/overview> (accessed on 28 August 2023), “Overview”.

protection are central to ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity” and has committed to help countries deliver Universal Social Protection.⁸

However, similar to the findings of other civil society organizations and experts,⁹ Amnesty International, has found that, while the World Bank calls for countries to adopt universal social protection systems, in many cases, it is continuing to fund social protection programmes based on poverty targeting that is narrow in scope and coverage and thus repeating some of the same flawed processes and outcomes. Many of the poverty targeted social protection programmes funded by the World Bank rely on proxy means testing and the use of digital technologies to determine eligibility for social security programmes. The introduction of digital technologies, and in particular the use of automation, in the absence of adequate human rights protections and safeguards can bring with it particular human rights risks and concerns and can entrench and reproduce problems caused by issues with poverty targeting.

Proxy means tests are a form of targeting where, eligibility for social protection schemes is determined based on household characteristics being used as proxies for wealth, such as household composition, type of housing, existence of goods such as radio, television or refrigerators, productive assets such as farmland or cattle, or level of education of household members. Households are then ranked or allocated scores based on this data, and of these, qualifying households are considered eligible for assistance.¹⁰

The cases included in this briefing are drawn from Amnesty International’s published research in Sri Lanka in 2022 and early 2023; a forthcoming report on Lebanon for which research was conducted in May-June 2023, and a forthcoming report on Serbia for which research was conducted in April-September 2023 building on a legal opinion filed in 2022 at the Serbian Constitutional Court.¹¹

In addition to the shortcomings mentioned above, Amnesty International has also found that information about how and why people are chosen to receive benefits was not always publicly available, which raises concerns about transparency and the appropriateness of the targeting. In these cases, some of the most marginalized people, such as people with disabilities, older people, people living in poverty and people working in the informal sector were also excluded. Marginalized groups are often left out as they are poorly covered in datasets that are being used as the basis for targeting (so-called enumeration systems) with the information on them being often incomplete, inaccurate and sometimes unavailable.¹² This lack of transparency around how data is collected and weighted by the technologies and automated systems for social protection can further compound their marginalization by making it harder for individuals to challenge decisions about their eligibility for social protection, and for civil society organizations to ensure that there is no discrimination in the criteria themselves or in the application of those criteria.

The World Bank’s continued push for poverty targeted programmes rather than those providing universal coverage (as shown in the cases below) is not only inconsistent with its commitment to promote universal social protection but it also has serious human rights implications and often leads to the exclusion and stigmatization of some of the most marginalized and discriminated groups.

2. LEBANON

Lebanon is facing one of the worst economic crisis in its recent history. As a response to the economic crisis, Lebanon introduced the Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net Project (ESSN) in 2021.¹³ The ESSN, which is funded through a World Bank loan, scales up Lebanon’s existing poverty targeted social assistance programme called the National Poverty Targeting Programme

8 ILO and World Bank Group, “A Shared Mission for Universal Social Protection”, 30 June 2015, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/social-security/WCMS_378991/lang-en/index.htm

9 Daisy Sibun, “Can a leopard change its spots? A critical analysis of the World Bank’s ‘progressive universalism’ approach to social protection”, September 2022, Development Pathways, <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Final-Progressive-universalism-report-with-preface-22Sept2022.pdf>

10 Stephen Kidd et al, “Exclusion by design: An assessment of the effectiveness of the proxy means test poverty targeting mechanism”, ESS Working Paper No. 56, 2017, ILO and Development Pathways, <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Exclusion-by-design-An-assessment-of-the-effectiveness-of-the-proxy-means-test-poverty-targeting-mechanism-1-1.pdf>

11 ESCR-Net, *Legal Opinion on International and Comparative Human Rights Law Concerning the Matter of the Social Card Law Pending before the Constitutional Court of Serbia*, 28 November 2022, https://www.escr-net.org/sites/default/files/social_cards_legal_opinion_-_final_pub.pdf

12 United Nations University – Institute in Macau, “A Typological Framework for Data Marginalisation: Identifying Forms of Marginalization and Exclusion in Data-intensive Ecosystems”, https://i.unu.edu/media/cs.unu.edu/page/4453/UNU-MACAU_Data_Marginalization_Flyer.pdf

13 The World Bank, “Lebanon Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net Project”, <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P173367>

(NPTP). Like the NPTP, the ESSN uses proxy means testing to identify “extremely poor households”, and then uses categorial targeting (such as households headed by women) to prioritize “socially vulnerable categories”. The introduction of ESSN in Lebanon is an example of the World Bank continuing to promote narrow poverty targeting despite a situation where the majority of people are facing food insecurity, unemployment, and unaffordable healthcare.

The structure of social security in Lebanon means that social security coverage can be accessed either through formal employment or because someone in the household is employed in the formal sector; or through one of the cash transfer programmes targeted at people living in poverty. Social insurance programmes do not cover the informal sector. As a result, people working in the informal sector who are not ‘poor enough’ to qualify for the NPTP or ESSN remain ineligible for social protection, even during the economic crisis.

Amnesty International’s forthcoming research highlights that some of the challenges with ESSN have been around adequacy of coverage. In Lebanon, 82% of people – 4 million in total – were estimated to be living in multidimensional poverty in 2021, with 34% at ‘extreme’ levels.¹⁴ However, ESSN aims to cover just 20% of the population.¹⁵



Retired servicemen are removing a razor wire barricade outside Lebanon’s central bank during a demonstration demanding inflation-adjustments to their pensions in Beirut, Lebanon, on March 30, 2023. ©Fadel Itani/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Registration for ESSN has also been a challenge as there was only a two-month window period (December 2021 to January

2022) when people could apply for it online. Those who missed this period have been left out from registering for support.

Amnesty International also found that information on the formula used to ascertain eligibility for ESSN is not publicly available. This includes the list of data points and variables collected from applicants, and the weights assigned to them.

“I ask at NGO clinics, I ask people I know for money, I do all this... However, some months, when I can’t afford to, I don’t take my medicines.”

W14¹⁶

W14 is the sole carer for her three children, one of whom has a psychosocial disability and needs regular access to mental health care. Her husband died about six years ago. She works as a cleaner and a janitor in the informal sector and earns about USD 15 a month. She has no other regular source of income and does not receive any form of social protection benefits from the government. Because she and her husband were always employed informally, she does not have health insurance coverage of any kind. She has a chronic health condition, which requires several regular medicines. She tries to get these free from her local primary healthcare centre whenever they are available. If they are not available, she must buy them herself, and they can cost up to USD 50 a month. “I ask at NGO clinics, I ask people I know for money, I do all this,” she told Amnesty International. “However, some months, when I can’t afford to, I don’t take my medicines.” Her biggest concern is the care for her son who has a disability, including his access to mental health care which is hard to access regularly since it not easily available free of cost. His school recently told her that he needed some additional support, but she is not sure she can afford this. She had applied for the ESSN programme in the two-month window period between December 2021 to January 2022, however had not heard anything further about her application in June 2023 when she spoke with Amnesty International.

¹⁴ UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), “Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021) Painful reality and uncertain prospects”, September 2021, Policy Brief 2, https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634_-_multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_-_policy_brief_-_en.pdf

¹⁵ World Bank Group, “Lebanon Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net Project (ESSN) -Project Fact Sheet”, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/517791610478201970-0280022021/original/MENALebanonESSNFactSheetEnglish.pdf>

¹⁶ Interview in person with W14 (name withheld), 3 June 2023.

3. SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has also been facing a severe economic crisis since 2020, which has had a catastrophic impact on people’s ability to access essential goods and services that underpin their economic and social rights. According to the World Bank update published in April 2023, national poverty in Sri Lanka is estimated to have doubled to 25% in 2022 from 13.1% in 2021 due to economic contraction (with an increase of 2.5 million people living in poverty) and is expected to increase to 27.5% in 2023.¹⁷

According to the IMF Country Report released in March 2023, only 0.6% of GDP is projected to be spent on social protection in 2023;¹⁸ civil society groups have criticized this as being inadequate, given the effect of austerity measures and the steep rise in the cost of living. The need for increased social spending is more critical than ever for people to withstand the effects of the economic crisis and secure their future by ensuring that they have access to affordable and quality healthcare, and access to nutritious food among other essential goods and services.¹⁹



A patient walks through a deserted government hospital in Colombo. Bankrupt Sri Lanka’s hospitals were crippled, and transport disrupted on 15 March 2023 as trade unions protested against the doubling of taxes to qualify for a crucial IMF bailout. ©ISHARA S. KODIKARA/AFP via Getty Images

Despite the economic crisis hitting the incomes of a large majority of people in Sri Lanka, the

World Bank has funded the government of Sri Lanka to roll out the ‘Aswesuma’ Welfare Benefit Payment Scheme – another narrowly poverty targeted programme. *Aswesuma* is part of the World Bank’s USD 200 million ‘Social Protection Project’.²⁰ According to studies by LIRNEasia, a Colombo-based policy think tank, the proposed formula for *Aswesuma* for identifying families below the poverty line has a high exclusion rate of 47% – that means it identifies approximately 1.1 of the 2 million families living below the poverty line.²¹

Like in the case of other proxy-means tests, eligibility for *Aswesuma* is determined using a ‘deprivation score’ based on 22 data points which include access to electricity, access to drinking water, vehicle ownership, access to toilets, and type of housing and land ownership.²² A monthly welfare allowance is to be paid to four groups identified as “transitional”, “vulnerable”, “poor” and “severely poor”. In addition, persons with disabilities, receiving renal support and older persons have also been identified as beneficiaries for monthly welfare benefits. Colombo Urban Lab, a Sri Lanka based organization, has highlighted that the eligibility criteria for *Aswesuma* were developed in 2019, well before the Covid-19 pandemic or the economic crisis which should have informed its design.²³

According to the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice (FCEJ), “a household is not considered poor if a family member possesses a permanent house, clean drinking water and toilet facilities, a motorbike, and livestock.”²⁴ Civil society groups have raised concerns about the process adopted to verify those eligible for welfare benefits. According to a policy brief by FCEJ, the verification process was “found to be coercive with excessive surveillance and data gathering, caused fear and fuelled social disharmony, and appears poised to fail extremely vulnerable populations.” The Collective further noted that “people are being pushed out by the ‘hit or miss’ approach which adopts survey criteria designed prior to the

17 World Bank, *Sri Lanka Development Update: Time to Reset*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/sri-lanka-development-update-2023>
18 International Monetary Fund, *IMF Country Report No.23/116: Request for an extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility - Press Release, Staff Report, and Statement by the Executive Director for Sri Lanka*, March 2023, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2023/116/002.2023.issue-116-en.xml>
19 Daily Mirror, “IMF, Austerity and Social Protection”, 17 April 2023, <https://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/IMF-Austerity-and-Social-Protection/172-257659>
20 World Bank Group, “World Bank Group adopts Country Partnership Framework for Sri Lanka to help reset the economy, protect the poor”, 28 June 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/06/27/world-bank-group-adopts-country-partnership-framework-for-sri-lanka-to-help-reset-the-economy-protect-the-poor>

21 LIRNEasia, ‘Social Safety Nets and the State of Poverty in Sri Lanka’, 7 June 2023 <https://lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LIRNEasia-Social-Safety-Nets-and-the-State-of-Poverty-in-Sri-Lanka-3.pdf>
22 LIRNEasia, ‘Social Safety Nets and the State of Poverty in Sri Lanka’, 7 June 2023 (previously cited)
23 Colombo Urban Lab, ‘Borrowing to Eat: The Impact of Sri Lanka’s Economic Crisis on Colombo’s Working Class Poor’, Policy Brief, September 2023, <https://www.csf-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CUL-September-2023-Policy-Brief.pdf> pp. 6-7.
24 Daily FT, “World Bank and IMF’s targeted discourse against working poor of Sri Lanka”, 8 May 2023, <https://www.ft.lk/opinion/World-Bank-and-IMF-s-targeted-discourse-against-working-poor-of-Sri-Lanka/14-748032>

pandemic and economic crisis” and explained that “the process fails to measure the ability to ensure food security, meet basic nutritional needs and account for household debt which are major concerns under the current economic crisis.”²⁵

“People are being pushed out by the ‘hit or miss’ approach which adopts survey criteria designed prior to the pandemic and economic crisis.”

Feminist Collective for Economic Justice

As is often the experience with poverty targeted programmes, the roll out of *Aswesuma* is accompanied with stereotyping and stigmatization of people seeking support and those living in poverty. For example, the verification process for eligibility under *Aswesuma* was accompanied by a campaign named “*Aththema Kiyamu aththama ayata prathilaba demu*” (Let’s be honest – Benefit the real needy), thus implying that at least some of those applying for it were in fact looking to short change the system.²⁶

Amnesty International also found that *Aswesuma*’s narrow criteria do not include pregnant and breastfeeding women as a specific group in need of support through this programme. This is particularly worrying because as highlighted in recent research by Amnesty International, the economic crisis has meant that the supply of *Thripasha*, a food supplement provided universally to all pregnant and breastfeeding women, was often halted and food vouchers meant for this group were unredeemable due to lack of funds with the government.²⁷

At the time of writing, 217,000 objections have been logged against the implementation of *Aswesuma* while 800,000 appeals have been submitted regarding the new scheme.²⁸

4. SERBIA

Although Serbia has not been gripped by an economic crisis of the scale seen in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, the country experienced rapidly rising inflation and soaring cost of living, particularly affecting food and energy prices, largely caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has had a particularly adverse effect on those living in poverty in Serbia, which remains among the countries with greatest income disparity in Europe. According to the government’s most recent data, over 21% people in Serbia were at risk of poverty,²⁹ while 28% were at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with people living in rural areas and minorities, such as Roma, most affected.³⁰ The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for Serbia found that five out of six Roma households, or 83%, live in conditions of pronounced material deprivation, making Roma one of the most socially, economically and politically marginalized groups in the country.³¹

As a part of its programme supporting the Western Balkan countries to improve their social protection systems, the Bank provided Serbia with a loan for the establishment of the ‘social card registry’.³² In 2021, Serbia passed the Law on Social Card, which set up the social card registry, a centralized database which contains data on the socio-economic status of individual applicants and related persons, and is used to determine eligibility for social protection.³³

Amnesty International found that in one year of the implementation, the law, and in particular the automated data processing system that it relies on, have led to thousands of people losing access to social security assistance.³⁴

The loss of assistance hit families with children exceptionally hard. Besim from Belgrade has four young children, two of whom are babies. “They need baby formula and diapers. We always lived modestly and without any luxuries,

25 Feminist Collective for Economic Justice, *Social Protection for Sri Lanka: A Progressive Gender Sensitive Response to the Crisis*, May 2023, Policy Brief,

https://www.srilankafeministcollective.org/_files/ugd/06bf48_e91e38e5a22d47c2a3e3e1684201812c.pdf

26 Feminist Collective for Economic Justice, “World Bank and IMF’s targeted discourse against working poor of Sri Lanka”, 8 May 2023, The Daily FT, <https://www.ft.lk/opinion/World-Bank-and-IMF-s-targeted-discourse-against-working-poor-of-Sri-Lanka/14-748032>

27 Amnesty International, “Forgoing Meals to Make-Do: The Impact of Sri Lanka’s Economic Crisis on Maternal Nutrition” (previously cited)

28 Sandro Sathyaith, “Objections against Aswesuma under examination”, 14 August 2023, News First, <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2023/08/14/objections-against-aswesuma-under-examination/>

29 The relative poverty line in Serbia is 24,064 Serbian Dinars (212 EURO) a month, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia Poverty and Social Inequality, 2020, 15.10.2021, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-vesti/20211015-siromastvo-i-socialna-nejednakost-2020?ts=0102>

30 Republic of Serbia, *Household Budget Survey, Income and Living Conditions Survey - Income and Living Conditions*, 14 October 2022, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2022/Htm/E/G20221287.html>, “Poverty and Social Inequality 2021”.

31 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Serbia: Generating Evidence to Deliver for Children - Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, October 2020, available at <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/16076/file/MICS%20%20Multiple%20Indicator%20Cluster%20Survey.pdf>, p. xxxv.

32 The Government of the Republic of Serbia, “Government passes Social Card Bill”, 21st January 2021.

<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/166629/government-passes-social-card-bill.php>

33 Law on Social Card, Article 3, <https://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/113430/142249/F1212285272/SRB-113430.pdf>

34 Forthcoming Amnesty International report on Serbia’s Social Card Registry.

but now we can't even buy food. This is particularly hard for my children who are in school. We used the money from social assistance to get food, hygiene supplies and clothes for them, so they can look like other children and not get bullied because they are Roma. Now I am not sure if we can keep sending them to school. We literally can't give them a snack to take to school. Education is very important to us. I want our children to go to school and have a better life, but without food and proper hygiene, it's very difficult."

According to a local organization supporting the beneficiaries with legal aid, in a little over one year of the implementation of the law, between February 2022 and July 2023, around 27,000 – or close to 15% of the existing beneficiaries – were removed from the social protection system.³⁵ Amnesty International found that people who lost social assistance were "flagged" by the social card registry primarily because the system identified earnings that put them above the minimum threshold for assistance.

The level of social assistance in Serbia is grossly inadequate.³⁶ The income threshold for eligibility for social assistance is around 200 euro per month, with some exceptions for seasonal work. The monthly social assistance available as social security is around 132 euro for a family of three. This is particularly low given that it is less than a half of the cost of the average consumer basket (323 euro) and well below the poverty threshold of 270 euro for a family of this size.³⁷ As a result, many people living in poverty, including the Roma, have no choice but to try and supplement social assistance with earnings through other means.

Amnesty International found that these modest earnings, often between 100-300 euro made by collecting and selling secondary raw materials, such as plastic, bottles, cardboard and scrap metal, often disqualified people from social assistance. In some cases, the data on such earnings was incorrect. In other cases, people who had old disused cars sold for scrap metal still registered to their name were also excluded

from the assistance although they no longer owned the cars. As other similar systems relying on the processing of vast amounts of data and a degree of automation in flagging individuals for further investigation by social workers, Serbia's social card registry increased the risk of inaccurate data that often does not reflect real conditions in which people live.

Amnesty International's forthcoming research on Serbia highlights the multiple ways in which the social card registry, which is a part of the World Bank and country's commitment to implement poverty targeting,³⁸ has limited people's access to social security and had a disproportionate impact on Roma and people with hidden disabilities, who are among the most marginalized communities in Serbia and are overrepresented in the country's social care system.³⁹

In a legal opinion submitted to Serbia's Constitutional Court in November 2022, Amnesty International expressed concern that the automated system underpinning the social card registry lacked the necessary safeguards and protection against possible arbitrary and unfair decisions and its disproportionate and potentially discriminatory impact on Roma communities.⁴⁰



People of Sinti and Roma minority collect cardboard in front of a Roma settlement on 28 May 2015, Belgrade, Serbia. ©Thomas Trutschel/Photothek via Getty Images

³⁵ Danas, "Novim zakonom 27,000 ljudi izgubilo pravo na socijalnu pomoc," 2 August 2023, <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/ekonomija/novim-zakonom-27-000-ljudi-izgubilo-pravo-na-socijalnu-pomoc/>

³⁶ In its 2021 Conclusions on Serbia, the European Committee for Social Rights said that the level of social assistance continued to be well below the threshold of absolute poverty, and urged Serbia to increase the amount of social security benefits to ensure that recipients can enjoy an adequate standard of living. European Committee of Social Rights, *Conclusions 2021: Serbia*, March 2022, <https://rm.coe.int/conclusions-2021-serbia-en/1680a5da16>, pp. 38-41. See also: European Committee of Social Rights, *Conclusions 2017: Serbia*, January 2018, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1425561/1226_1519804752_cr-2017-srb-eng.pdf, pp. 34-37.

³⁷ European Commission, *Serbia 2022 Report*, 12 October 2022, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf>

³⁸ World Bank Group, *Advancing Social Protection and Opportunities for Reform in the Western Balkans*, April 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/brief/advancing-social-protection-and-opportunities-for-reform-in-the-western-balkans>

³⁹ According to the research by the Statistical Office of Serbia carried out in 2019, 84% of households in Roma settlements receive some type of cash benefits, such as social assistance, child allowance or one-off financial assistance. Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Serbia: Generating Evidence to Deliver for Children - Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019* (previously cited), p. xxxv.

⁴⁰ ESCR-Net, *Legal Opinion on International and Comparative Human Rights Law Concerning the Matter of the Social Card Law Pending before the Constitutional Court of Serbia* (previously cited).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The World Bank, as one of the major global funders of social protection systems has a key role to play in realizing the right to social security for all. In line with its human rights responsibilities and commitment made in terms of universal social protection, it ought to ensure that the programmes it supports lead to universal and comprehensive coverage. It also has the responsibility to ensure that it does not cause or contribute to the undermining of human rights and further entrenching patterns of poverty and discrimination through the systems and programmes it promotes.

Amnesty International therefore calls on the World Bank to act in line with its human rights responsibilities and its commitment to universal social protection and ensure that its funding and technical support of social protection programmes:

- Phases out its support to narrow poverty targeted programmes and replaces these with programmes that are designed to progressively achieve universal social protection;
 - Is in line with ILO General Recommendation 202 that calls for the establishment of Social Protection Floors which at a minimum include ensure that everyone has access to adequate levels of healthcare; maternity/paternity benefits; child benefits; basic income security for persons who are unable to earn a sufficient income, in cases of sickness, unemployment, and disability; and basic income security for older persons;
 - Meets a level of adequacy that allow people to access their right to an adequate standard of living;
 - Factors in and addresses the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination that many groups including women, people with disabilities, older people, people living in poverty, people working in the informal sector, children and people belonging to racialized and otherwise minoritized communities face when trying to claim their human rights;
- Guarantees transparency and accountability – through accessible grievance redress and appeals processes; data protection through secure systems; and ensures that where automation-based decision making is used, it is in line with human rights standards on privacy, equality and non-discrimination and is never used in a way that could lead to discriminatory or harmful outcomes;
 - Includes an independent human rights impact assessment of any social protection system and the potential digital technologies that underpin it as well as follow up assessments to evaluate its application to determine any potential issues post introduction, including potentially discriminatory effects on specific groups; and
 - Ensures that when a new system is introduced, information about how it functions, the criteria it considers and any appeals mechanisms in place to challenge decision making, are widely disseminated in an accessible format.

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