

CHANGE

Changing work, changing incomes: designing a responsive social protection system for all

DURATION
1/02/2023 - 1/05/2027

BUDGET
937 178 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The COVID-19 pandemic once again demonstrated the vital role social security plays in safeguarding people's livelihood in the face of major disruptive shocks. Yet preliminary analysis also suggests that some groups were not sufficiently covered. **While the problem of inadequate social protection coverage became highly visible during the COVID19 disruption, it is part of a broader problem that developed welfare states need to confront head-on.**

Atypical employment, including parttime or fixed-term employment, is on the rise, while also hybrid forms of work have started to emerge, with individuals combining various forms of employment and self-employed activities. *Labour law* has been "adapted" to accommodate the demand for flexible work by new non-standard work forms. Meanwhile, social insurance is still to a large extent organised around a clear distinction between wage employment and self-employment and based on the figure of the stable full-time worker. This leads to important gaps in social insurance protections. **As such, a reorganisation of contemporary social protection systems around new markers of vulnerability requires an integrated and interdisciplinary re-assessment of the way we organize solidarity, taking explicit account of legal possibilities, administrative feasibility and expected gains in terms of social outcomes.** This project undertakes to do an in-depth investigation into these issues, with a clear focus on the situation of the broad group of non-standard workers. Our ultimate objective is to offer viable pathways towards more adequate social protection for all.

We assess vulnerability among the active population at large, yet with a **specific and explicit focus on the broad group of non-standard workers**: self-employed; atypical employees such as parttime, fixed term or agency workers; those combining different jobs, or employment with a self-employed activity; and those in new work forms. We ask how the increasing relevance in legal non-standard work forms can and should be accommodated by a recalibration of social protection. **We add further understanding of the association between background characteristics known to be related with inadequate social protection coverage (including ethnicity, education, family type, gender, and disability).**

This project combines empirical social policy and poverty analyses with legal analyses in an interdisciplinary perspective: we ask what the legal implications are of using different markers of vulnerability, so as to improve social protection.

Methodologically, CHANGE aims to push forward recent innovations in the measurement of living standards, financial resilience and welfare state responsiveness. To this end, we will exploit existing surveys and register data sources in quantitative analyses. In addition, we will gather new data on a broad and diverse group of non-standard workers, including different types of self-employed workers and atypical employees. This will enable us to understand the various (and often common) challenges they are confronted with, such as substandard coverage by social protection and fluctuating incomes. The impact of existing policies on vulnerable target groups, as well as legally viable policy changes will be assessed through (hypothetical household or micro) simulations.



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In sum, CHANGE will add to scholarly and wider societal debates on social policy design and effectiveness in a changing world of work. This project will produce insights relevant to all sections of society concerned with the consequences of economic, social and technological changes, particularly in the realms of poverty, financial vulnerability, social exclusion and social protection. The expected outcomes are **particularly relevant for ongoing debates among social partners, civil society organizations and of course policy makers and administrations. The results of CHANGE will be disseminated throughout the project in working papers and policy briefs. A concluding conference will be organized to disseminate the findings more widely.**

CONTACT INFORMATION

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LINKS

<https://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/onderzoeksgroep/csb/onderzoek/projecten/change/>