

Social Protection for Informal Workers: Trends and Changes

Registration: Key Concepts, Approaches and Strategies to Include Informal Workers

Introduction

In this briefing note we review the current debates on strategies, challenges and opportunities regarding registration in the context of social protection. In the first part, we will present the key concepts, approaches and debates on registration and situating it in the overall social protection system. The second section highlights the basic registration strategies, including outreach and awareness. We examine on-demand, census sweeps and other methods using existing data. Then, we move into innovative approaches to registration, where we look at the challenges and opportunities of digitization and what we can learn from digitally enabled responses to the COVID-19 crisis. We conclude by exploring the challenges faced by informal workers to be included in registration systems and the different policies implemented to specifically register these workers.

Registration: Key Concepts and Debates

Registration is a key building block of any social protection system. It is the first step to identify people and families to the social protection system, thus allowing it to know who the potential beneficiaries are, how many, where they are, etc. It generally consists of multiple processes: initiating contact, engaging potential beneficiaries, and gathering information on people's characteristics, needs, and conditions, then recording and verifying that information (Barca & Mejia 2023; Lindert et al. 2020). Registration is the first part of the social protection delivery chain, which is followed by enrolment, delivery, management and assessment (Lindert et al. 2020). It is particularly important for the more vulnerable people in society – in particular, the extremely poor, but also informal workers – as robust registration systems increase visibility and allow the government to address people's needs after an event or a shock.

If we look at social protection as a “solar system” (Barca & Mejia 2023), registration fits in the outer orbit of what is described as “delivery systems”. These elements are the administrative functions necessary to deliver the right benefit to the right person, in the right place, to those in need. In order to achieve this goal, governments generally rely on three types of registries: social registries, single registries and beneficiary registries.

Social registries are unified targeting databases that provide information on potentially eligible individuals or households that can be used to select the beneficiaries of poverty-

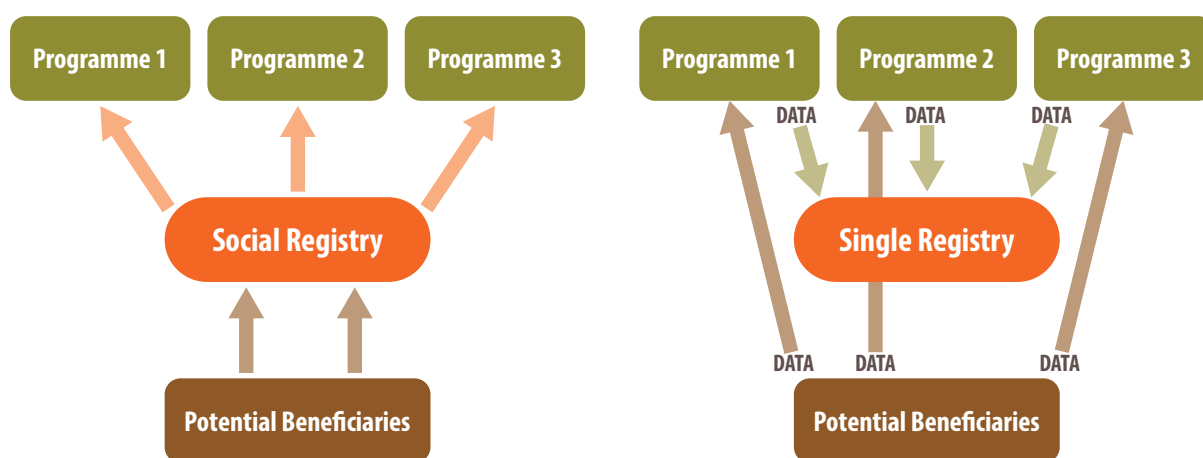


Source: Barca & Mejia (2023)

targeted social assistance schemes (Chirchir & Farooq 2016). These registries gather relevant information of potential beneficiaries and exclude those who do not meet the criteria. These registries often rank households from poorest to richest, and poverty-targeted programmes can use the ranking to select their beneficiaries. In many developing countries, such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Colombia, information stored in single registries is collected primarily to support the poverty assessments for safety net-type social protection programmes (Chirchir & Farooq 2016).

Single registries are platforms in which information from all government databases is brought together. These registries can be used as a monitoring tool by governments and can act as a nexus of information, enabling interlinkages between individual programmes and other external databases that can play a role in social policy, such as the tax system, civil registration and disability databases (Chirchir & Farooq 2016). The World Bank, however, regards single registry as a terminology used to refer to a particular type of social registry that serves multiple programmes (other countries may call them “unique registry,” or “unified registry”). Despite using terms like “single” or “unique”, multiple registries can coexist in a country, and the term often signals that while the social registry may serve as a gateway for multiple programmes, other programmes may still operate their own registration and eligibility systems in parallel (Leite et al. 2017).

Beneficiary registries are the actual lists of beneficiaries of a particular programme. They are distinct from social registries in their purposes, population coverage, and functions. Whereas social registries include information on all applicants and support the “gateway” functions of intake, registration and determination of eligibility, beneficiary registries include information only on those enrolled in specific programmes to support beneficiary and benefits administration. Other elements generally include benefits administration systems, grievance redress systems, case management systems and unique identification systems (Leite et al. 2017).



Source: Authors' Elaboration

Some countries might have a social registry, but not a beneficiary registry; for others it might be the other way around, and some might have both. For instance, Brazil has developed its social registry, Cadastro Único (CadÚnico, or Unified Registry), to coordinate benefits and beneficiaries of multiple programmes, but it does not have a beneficiary registry. This unified social registry enables Brazil to assess the demand for social programmes by profiling specific needs and conditions of various groups of the population. South Africa has a beneficiary registry, the National Integrated Social Information System (NISIS), but not a social registry. This allows South Africa to monitor and coordinate the “supply” of social programmes, assessing gaps and duplications in coverage of key bundles of benefits and services that could be tailored to the typical needs of profiled groups. Chile and Turkey have both types of registries, allowing them to combine both “supply” and “demand” assessments when developing social protection policies (Leite et al. 2017). In Chile, these registries support 80 different programmes (World Bank 2015).

Social registries are not without contestation. Here are some of the main criticisms:

- Such registries, despite being promoted as contributing to a wide range of social policy objectives, are in effect used primarily as poverty targeting tools, disregarding the evidence showing how deficient they are at accurately identifying poverty levels. (Kidd & Sibun 2020). A key challenge is what quantitative methodologies (proxy means tests) are applied to information contained in social registries to estimate people's or households' wealth or income to determine who falls below poverty lines.
- The use of social registries combined with means-testing poverty programmes may be detrimental in contexts where poverty is widespread and there is little difference between the incomes or assets of the poor and near-poor. In countries where the share of "near poor" is high, there is a high risk of social registries producing significant exclusion errors and, by virtue of their "gatekeeping" role to the wider social protection system, permanently excluding people in need from much of social policy. In Colombia and Indonesia, these exclusion errors reached 60 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively (Kidd et al. 2019). In some countries, these errors reached 90 per cent, due to factors such as design errors when proxy means tests are used, the poor quality of social registry surveys and the falsification of information by respondents (Kidd & Mohamud 2021).
- Income mobility can be quicker than information update. To highlight how this can have major effects in poverty-targeting programmes, Kidd et al. (2017) show how in Rwanda and Uganda, in only a few years (2010-2011, compared to 2013-14), poorer or middle-income people fell into the poorest quintiles. Similarly, families in the poorest or poorer quintiles might improve their situation in relative terms. Almost half of households moved out of the poorest 20 per cent of the population during this short period in these two countries. Significant inclusion and exclusion errors result from this mobility when static poverty-targeting mechanisms are used.
- Social registries might be inadequate to protect individuals or families after a shock. As these systems use household assets data collected years ago, they cannot tell us much about a family's current income (Kidd et al. 2017). When the COVID-19 crisis hit, millions of people in need were not in the social registries' databases, delaying the access to the benefits or excluding these people from receiving social assistance.

While there are debates about the best way to implement registries and their role in social protection systems, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having robust, universal registration systems in place. Countries with large-scale, up-to-date and inclusive registration systems generally performed better in responding to the social protection needs stemming from the crisis, as they were able to identify, enrol, and reach previously excluded groups in a timelier manner than countries that lacked such systems or had very limited to narrow and inflexible poverty-targeted systems and programmes (Kidd & Sibun 2020; Beazley et al. 2021).

Therefore, for some, a key lesson from the pandemic is to develop more comprehensive, flexible and inclusive registries that include individuals and families often absent from poverty-oriented databases but that are vulnerable to shocks (Ohlenburg 2022; Bastagli & Lowe 2021). This is particularly relevant for informal workers, who often are excluded from databases that focus narrowly on the poorest members of society, despite informal workers' significant vulnerabilities. In Thailand, for instance, registration happens once each year. Registrants can either appear in person at their local authority's office or sign up at a roving mobile registration unit (World Bank & International Labour Office 2016). This enables government to maintain a more up-to-date registry.

Registration Strategies

Registration involves a series of processes within the wider social protection delivery chain: outreach, assessment and enrolment.

Outreach is a key element of registration. It begins with clearly communicating to people about the existence of a social protection programme: who is eligible and how to register (Alvarenga 2022). It involves carefully explaining how the whole process works: how to register, what type of information will be asked, which documentation would be necessary to present, how people would be notified in case of potential acceptance or decline of eligibility or enrolment and more (Grunfeld & Ruggia-Frick, 2022).

Outreach mechanisms, platforms, and campaigns can benefit from using digital technologies to increase the visibility of a programme by communicating its existence on a large scale so that more individuals know about it. The use of digital technology was particularly important during the COVID-19 crisis. Many countries, such as Colombia, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Pakistan and Togo, resorted to the use of mobile phone messaging to reach potential beneficiaries. In Peru, Jordan, and Brazil, governments used an online platform or apps. The strategy in Bangladesh was to adapt to the national hotline. All these countries adapted or expanded from systems in use before the crisis (Barca 2021).

Another key element in the registration chain is the quality of the information systems that support decision-making: the degree to which data are up-to-date and, thus, represent individual and household conditions accurately. To this end, countries rely on a variety of registration strategies: census surveys and on-demand (online or offline) registration.

- Census sweeps are a typical approach to registration, through waves of mass data collection. Usually census survey registrations are carried out every 4–5 years, with registration (and updates) closed during the interim years (Leite et al 2017). In some cases, however, registries take much longer to be updated. Census sweeps are also a key component of social assistance schemes, in particular those programmes based on poverty-targeting cash transfers. Examples of this en masse “static” type of registration method include the Benazir National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) in Pakistan, recently updated in 2021, and the Colombian SISBEN, updated in 2023. In the case of the Colombian system, although it follows the usual update frequency of a census sweep, exclusion error is around 19 per cent (Simms 2020).

Advantage

This method is best suited for contexts with high poverty, high eligibility rates, a high degree of socio-economic homogeneity and stable poverty levels, where programmes need to keep records of near-poor and non-poor households – linked to social insurance schemes or in case of an emergency (Barca & Hebbar 2020). Many countries operate with these “fixed list systems”, as many of the key ingredients for implementing dynamic inclusion systems are difficult to achieve (Leite et al. 2017).

Disadvantage

It can keep outdated data for long periods of time (Kidd et al 2021). This is because census sweeps are very costly in terms of logistics and resources. This limitation proved to be consequential for countries such as the Philippines, which has a broad social registry that was not up to date. For this reason, when COVID-19 hit, the Philippines had to rely on manual registry to deliver the benefit for the target population (Beazley et al. 2021).

- On-demand registration. Achieving an update frequency that ensures timely coverage is a permanent challenge in survey-based systems, and the pandemic has shown that they are fragile in times of crisis. To face the frequency issue, some specialists recommend a shift from survey sweeps to a greater emphasis on on-demand registration (Ohlenburg 2022). On-demand systems are considered dynamic because data and registration are a continuous process and, therefore, are able to capture fluctuation of poverty and vulnerability of households and adjust the social protection programme's lists of beneficiaries and benefits accordingly.

Advantage

Advocates of on-demand registration argue that these applications, with a continuous registration processes open throughout the year from social registries, combined with active outreach to vulnerable populations, can serve as "dynamic" gateways for inclusion of the poor and vulnerable (Leite et al. 2017).

Disadvantage

On-demand programmes are difficult to implement in low-income countries where social assistance programmes are rather new, coverage is small, fiscal space is constrained and administrative capacity limited (Leite et al. 2017). These "dynamic" approaches, although not as extensive as a census sweep, entail an ongoing, labour-intensive effort to collect and analyze data by which all households in an area are interviewed at selected intervals.

Regardless of the registration strategy, one key issue is data privacy and security throughout the implementation cycle: collection, registration, storage, use, sharing and disposal. These registries often contain large amounts of sensitive data from individuals and households, which calls for beneficiaries' personal data to be handled securely. Many countries, however, do not have data protection regulations and frameworks in place. In Africa and Asia, only 60 per cent of the countries have such institutions, while among the lowest-income countries, this share drops to 50 per cent (UNCTAD 2021). Even in countries where laws exist, legislation often was developed after major digitization projects were undertaken, sometimes because of violations during the project rollout. For instance, in India, security breaches in the Aadhaar biometric ID rollout occurred, pushing the government to strengthen data protection frameworks (Lowe 2023). This involves ensuring data security demands by having the appropriate equipment (i.e. hardware and software) and having the necessary procedures and organizational guidelines in place. In addition, it is important to protect access to data, social programme installations, hardware and software (Wagner & Ferro 2020).

Innovative Approaches to Registration

Over the past few years, advances in technology allowed many countries to streamline and integrate data registration and data updating in information systems to enhance uptake and dynamic inclusion. When the pandemic hit, data systems and digital technologies played a crucial role in providing relief in many steps of the system, particularly in the registration.

The constraints caused by the pandemic led to an acceleration of innovative ways to register new beneficiaries, starting with outreach. Governments relied on digital technologies to reach beneficiaries at an unprecedented scale (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023; IPC-IG 2021).

In many countries, on-demand registration is now facilitated through various digital channels, including applications through a website, by email, with a phone-based messaging system or

mobile apps, which were used in countries like Argentina, Chile and Australia. In Brazil, the app received 57.2 million requests in 2020, of which 38.2 million were considered eligible for the Emergency Grant. This information gave rise to a new social registry called ExtraCad. The merits of this database include the visibility conferred on segments of the population excluded from government databases until then, particularly informal workers (World Bank 2021). However, although the use of mobile technologies was useful to reach a wider population in Brazil, the abrupt turn to digital technology in 2021 sometimes replaced the holistic, humanized process. This personalization was replaced by an automated process, in which a digital account is automatically created and the relation between citizen and state is mediated through apps, rather than a human being, which also created a barrier to many beneficiaries used to the current card-withdrawal system (Afshar 2021).

Within the on-demand registration, there are multiple types of approaches.

- Periodic active outreach. Countries adopting this route intermittently seek to encourage old registrants to update information and the inclusion of new registrants. This approach is used especially by those countries with limited fiscal and administrative capacity to roll out permanent on-demand registration structures. It also can complement on-demand or en-masse registration strategies. While not exactly conforming to the textbook definition of on-demand registration, it ensures that systems are at least partially dynamic (Azad 2022). In Zambia, the Social Cash Transfer used a mechanism in which potentially eligible households were encouraged to visit designated points at specific times to register (Arruda & Dubois 2018). Brazil employs an “active search” approach, in which social assistants proactively seek eligible people, especially vulnerable groups (indigenous people, slum dwellers, rural communities, etc.) for inclusion into social registry.
- Permanent local offices provide continuous, on-demand registration and enable staffers to contact beneficiaries directly. In Mexico, officials use the first payment period of the year to ask beneficiaries if there have been any changes to the currently held information via an updating form (Azad 2022). Similarly, federal deconcentrated local welfare offices have the advantage of having a more stable setting, allowing the build-up of permanent administrative capacity and expertise on social protection, such as in Mauritius and in South Africa. In countries where municipal/local government offices and devolved systems of government are solidly in place, the central government only creates a common framework and provides training. This approach is used by many countries in Latin America. Brazil, for instance, uses these local offices, called CRAS – Reference Centres in Social Assistance – as fixed outposts where families can go to register. This is combined with home visits by CRAS social workers and, occasionally, by the use of mobile service stations.
- Mobile units can be used not only on the registration and outreach, but to deliver benefits. The South African government, for instance, implemented these units as part of its Integrated Community Registration Outreach Programme (ICROP). Equipped and staffed, the ICROP facilitates beneficiary enrolment and registration, issues smart cards, maintains an online database, raises awareness, provides access to pay points, and conducts home visits by medical staff and social workers to ensure that individuals unable to go to the hospital or leave their homes — due to disability or sickness—have access to services and benefits. (World Bank & International Labour Organization 2016).
- Digital window approaches are increasingly adopted by many countries in the developing world for intake, registration and data updating. These often compliment other systems of registration already in place, like in Chile and in Azerbaijan (Azad 2022).

- Other forms of digital technology used in registration include artificial intelligent (AI) chatbots that help guide applicants through the application process, and AI-based image recognition and digital identification, including biometric data (Lowe 2023). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, the government used mobile phone data from priority neighbourhoods to identify and exclude owners of mobile phones likely to be ineligible for a scheme, but also to reach potential beneficiaries through SMS messages. In Namibia, also through SMS, the government received almost 80 per cent of applications in one week, while in Peru more than 3 million households were registered during the two-week online registration window (Barca & Hebbbar 2020).

- Use existing administrative databases (e.g. civil registration/national ID) to register beneficiaries, in which the system automatically initiates registration and subsequent enrolment, without expecting citizens to proactively apply (Beazley & Barca 2020). The advantage of this approach lies in lowering the data collection costs (Azad 2022). During the responses to the pandemic, the automatic enrolment based on pre-existing databases provided an advantage. Through this approach, they managed to pay beneficiaries faster than interventions that relied on collecting new data via on-demand registration, community-based targeting (CBT), or mixed modalities (Beazley et al. 2021). One example of this during the COVID-19 pandemic was the Brazilian Auxílio Emergencial (Emergency Grant), which combined the use of its CadÚnico social registry with other databases (such as the “Individual Micro Entrepreneur” programme, formal labour registries and tax authority databases) to identify beneficiaries (World Bank 2021). Chile relies extensively on the use of existing administrative data and on information provided by citizens at the local level. These databases include information from other entities like the National Disability Register, the Register of Vehicles, the Income Tax Payment Register, and Civil Registration, among others. A key success factor for such interoperability was the existence of near universal ID numbers and birth registration, both of which cover 98 per cent of people in the country (Lowe 2023).

During the first year of the COVID-19 crisis, Peru managed to cover the gaps and out-of-date information in its databases by leveraging other government databases and on-demand registration. This allowed the government to create an up-to-date and near-universal social registry containing 33 million people (from a pre-COVID-19 base of 25 million people listed in the social registry), which accounts for over 99 per cent of the population. In this, the government made use of cross-government databases in other ways, including exchanging data with the government entities responsible for identification and civil registration, people with disabilities, migration, and the state bank (Beazley et al. 2021). The government also used information provided by non-governmental organizations to address the issue of insufficient and outdated information. However, the government refused to use available local administrative data on the registration of informal workers to deliver the emergency benefit to these workers (Rocca, 2021).

- Integrated data system represents a step further in relation to the use of other government databases. Mongolia used this strategy with its Universal Child Money Programme. Between 2012 and 2016, the country implemented a universal child benefit programme in which all children were enrolled automatically as soon as they were registered at the Civil Registration Department (Azad 2022). This integration ensured that payments were discontinued automatically once children reached 18 years of age. This enrolment drive led to nearly 100 per cent of children aged 0-17 years receiving this benefit in 2015. Other examples of data integration on registration involve using national IDs to reach all potential beneficiaries (Singapore and Japan, for example) or to target the better-off individuals, like in Bolivia, Namibia and Argentina. Some countries, such as the USA, resorted to tax data to roll out their emergency programme (Barca & Hebbbar 2020).

These innovative approaches have received both praise and criticism, which often relate to their digital nature. Critics point out that despite the arguments around gains in cost-effectiveness and efficiency, there is no clear evidence that digitization reduces administration costs, at least in the medium term (Wagner & Ferro, 2020; Gelb et al., 2020). Indeed, while new technologies have the potential to simplify processes, reduce some costs, and increase efficiency, they might have high technological cost, required investments into different skill sets for administrative staff, and the need to regularly update data (Wagner & Ferro 2020).

While digital technology may reduce some barriers, such as the need to travel long distances to register or receive payments, which can reduce the time informal workers may have to spend away from their work, new barriers may be established. Registration restricted to digital media is flagged as one of the controversial aspects of the Brazilian Emergency Grant, as it imposes immediate constraints on the portion of the population with no internet access (World Bank 2021). More broadly, digitalized social protection can generate new forms of injustices, such as the shift from social protection being a fundamental right to being conditional on registration in digital systems, as in India's Aadhaar or Uganda's Ndaga Muntu digital identification systems (Cioffi et al. 2022; Masiero & Das 2019).

Including Informal Workers in Registration Processes

Although many efforts have been made over the past two decades to improve intake and strengthen social registry databases, a key challenge governments face is to include in their system those who are neither among the poorest of the poor nor among the better-off workers from the formal sector: the so-called missing middle. This problem is particularly important in developing countries, where workers in the informal economy comprise the majority of the labour force and often are excluded from social protection programmes. These workers often face exclusion from government databases for lack of documentation, limited information about processes, and inaccessible processes. In the context of this exclusion, the moves towards digital systems that are gatekeepers, not just to specific programmes but prerequisites to participation in much of public policy, is concerning (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023).

The public sector in low- and middle-income countries typically holds detailed socio-economic information on two population segments: the chronically poor, who benefit from social assistance and are covered in programme databases and social registries, and the often relatively small population of formal-sector employees, who are covered by tax and social security systems. Although the proportion of the population captured in social registries is rising in many countries, an important part of the population - in between the extremes of the income distribution - still remains "unknown" to systems. However, experiences in some countries, such as Brazil, have shown that this part of the population, while not included in social protection-oriented databases, sometimes already features in other government databases (Ohlenburg 2022), pointing towards the possibility of connecting the dots and improving the interoperability of different databases.

This "missing middle" of economically vulnerable households with limited savings needs to be included in social protection registries if the sector is to live up to its aspiration of not just ensuring universal access to social protection programmes that protect against life cycle and economic risks, but also providing broad-based support during large-scale shocks and crises.

While on-demand registration played a significant role in expanding the reach of social protection programmes during COVID-19, it also likely entailed significant exclusion of vulnerable people and communities who lacked access to the internet, mobile phones, etc., as on-demand registration was often conducted online or via SMS. This underscores the importance of digital inclusion efforts (Beazley et al. 2021). In South Africa, during COVID-19, the government expanded the Social Relief

of Distress (SRD) grant, reaching millions of workers previously excluded, but its digital registration requirements excluded many others who did not have access to internet, mobile phones or were not fully digitally literate (Faiker 2024).

These barriers are particularly felt among informal workers. WIEGO's study undertaken in 11 different cities pointed to persistent challenges that this group faced in accessing social protection. Key obstacles include the lack of data on informal workers, complicated administrative procedures involved in the application process, as well as limited access to digital technologies and low levels of digital literacy (Chen et al. 2021). As digitization of social protection is often framed around the reduction of "leakage and inclusion errors" (Lowe 2022), informal workers likely will continue to face significant administrative and documentation-related barriers in registering (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023).

Invisibility in government databases that acted as gatekeepers to eligibility for relief was a particularly important issue. In Lima, Peru, for instance, the most important barrier to access was not being listed in the country's incomplete social registry. The exclusion of non-citizens and documentation requirements were the main reasons reported by respondents who did not receive relief in Bangkok, Thailand, and Durban, South Africa (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023).

However, many governments have been trying to include informal workers in social protection schemes. In 2008 in Cambodia, the government implemented the IDPoor database, which facilitates access to social assistance for the poorest households. When the pandemic hit, the government scrambled to extend the programme, with the national rollout of On-Demand IDPoor (ODIDPoor), which enabled year-round registration. However, while there were innovations in accessing IDPoor, critics point out that further efforts are needed to broaden and enable inclusion of non-destitute but still vulnerable groups (Sevilla & Sinoeun 2023). They claim targeting the poorest home-based workers requires a highly dynamic system that captures their evolving realities. IDPoor, they say, should expand its categories to include near-poor or vulnerable households and design a different programme to prevent them from slipping into poverty (Ibid).

In India in 2021, during the pandemic, the government launched the e-Shram portal, which enabled the registration of more than 280 million informal workers by September 2023 (Piyusha 2023). This was the first-ever National Database of Unorganised Workers, including migrant workers, construction workers, gig and platform workers. By developing a national database of potential beneficiaries of social protection, the government will be able to deliver benefits regardless of where the person is living in the country (Majithia 2022). Eventually, the idea is to link the e-Shram database to social protection schemes, such as pensions and insurance, but it is not yet linked to any programmes. Despite its limitations, the e-Shram is an important first step to increase visibility of many work categories, such as home-based workers (Ibid), and it can become a gateway to social protection.

Another example of government-led efforts to include informal workers in social protection has been taking place in Kenya since 2019. The country has established a partnership with private companies and a mobile operator, which targets informal workers, including street vendors and informal transport workers. The platform makes it easy and convenient for self-employed workers to register with social security via their mobile phones (Bamu et al. 2022).

Organizations of informal workers played a critical role in expanding the reach of relief measures, providing assistance with selection and identification. In the most successful cases, this facilitation role built on long-standing relationships with the state, so a degree of trust and communication already existed (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023). Information from grass-roots organizations has been used in the identification of beneficiaries, particularly in contexts where informal workers

are completely absent from state databases. For example, in Sierra Leone, lists from government and trader associations were used in the second step of the selection and identification process to identify households with informal workers (Alfers & Juergens-Grant 2023). Data from business associations, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and other groups were used in Nigeria to supplement a proxy means test (Gentilini et al. 2021).

Many membership-based organizations drew on their existing relationship with state actors to provide “last mile” services, ensuring that their members were able to overcome major barriers to access, including those created by the use of digital systems and platforms (Alfers 2021; Alfers et al. 2020). This emphasizes the importance of grass-roots organizations as active participants in the public sphere and the very real need for their inclusion across social protection systems, from governance to delivery.

The provision of “last mile” support, ensuring connections between benefits and beneficiaries, was an important role for organizations of informal workers. Organizations worked to establish more effective connections between their constituencies and the state benefits on offer, thereby facilitating access to relief measures. In Thailand, for example, grass-roots organizations raised awareness of the government’s cash benefit and assisted members with online registrations. In India, organizations of informal workers raised awareness of food benefits and worked with their members to overcome documentation barriers to access (WIEGO 2021). Organizations also provided essential services to their members, thereby supplementing the crisis response. In parts of India, self-help groups have worked to establish community kitchens (de Hoop et al. 2020) and to provide public health information, access to testing and health care, and personal protective equipment (Kala 2020).

On the other hand, some critics argue that the use of grass-roots organizations in selection and identification comes “at a cost financially” and may ultimately undermine the building of state capacity in the provision of social protection (Gentilini et al. 2021). It also has been argued that the reliance on grass-roots organizations has sometimes unfairly shifted responsibility onto under-resourced organizations of the poor and may result in the exclusion of the unorganized (Devenish & Afshar 2021).

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About WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org.

