



REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PEER REVIEW ON COVERAGE AND NON-TAKE-UP OF MINIMUM INCOME

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What is EMIN?

The European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) is an informal Network of organisations and individuals committed to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes. The organisations involved include the relevant public authorities, service providers, social partners, academics, policy makers at different levels, NGOs, and fosters the involvement of people who benefit or could benefit from minimum income support.

EMIN is organised at EU and national levels, in all the Member States of the European Union and also in Iceland, Norway, Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia.

EMIN is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). More information on EMIN can be found at www.emin-eu.net

What is this Report?

This report builds on existing research on coverage and take-up of benefits, with a focus on minimum income schemes, on the contributions on the situation in their country of national EMIN teams who participated in this peer review, and on the discussions at the peer review on possible ways to improve coverage and take-up of minimum income benefits

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Executive summary

Minimum Income schemes in Europe take different forms. Even though they are different, non-take up of Minimum Income is a problem in most of the countries. Non-take-up means that a person or a household is eligible for a Minimum Income but for some reason does not claim it. In addition to this, Minimum Income schemes in many countries are not covering extensively the people in need. Non-take-up can be explained and approached from different perspectives. The factors affecting take-up can be classified at four levels: factors related to administration, benefit design, individual level factors and society.

To draw suggestions on how to increase the coverage and reduce non-take-up of Minimum Income, a Peer Review was organized in Helsinki (March 13.-14.). Eight countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and the UK) participated in the Peer review to exchange ideas on reducing non-take-up and increasing the coverage of the Minimum Income schemes. Besides country presentations, two working groups were organized to draw suggestions on how to reduce non-take-up.

According to the working groups, there are several things that can be done at the administrative level to reduce non-take-up. Information on the Minimum Income and the social security system in general must be provided. Where possible, benefits should be granted automatically. Staff at the local welfare offices should be well trained and provided with adequate resources to help assisting people claiming the benefit. Decisions on the benefit should be made fast and claimants should have a possibility to revise their application and file a complaint on the decision. IT-databases and solutions could be used in identifying the households not taking up their benefit. Co-operation with other public authorities or NGOs could increase the possibility of people taking up the benefits they are entitled to. There are also possibilities in the benefit level. Increasing the coverage and level of Minimum Income could decrease the stigma related to the benefit. Minimum Income should be more sensitive to the individual circumstances and use an enabling approach instead of a punitive approach. Several channels for claiming are needed to improve accessibility of the scheme. Simplifying the entitlement criteria and language used in the forms could have positive impacts on non-take-up. Two suggestions on the societal level were made. Raising awareness about Minimum Income among the public, could be reducing stigma. Increasing Internet penetration is important if online services are a core part of the Minimum Income.

1. Purpose of the Peer Review on coverage and non-take-up

The purpose of the Peer Review was to exchange information on successful approaches on increasing coverage of the Minimum Income and reducing the non-take-up and to share experiences between countries. The Peer Review took place in Helsinki (March 13. – 14.), with presentations from eight countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and the UK. Besides the country representatives, a presentation from Eurofound provided an introductory presentation to the issue of non-take-up.

The purpose of this review is to report the information provided by the country representatives, report the key suggestions from working groups on how to reduce non-take-up and present conclusions and recommendations on how to increase the take-up of Minimum Income benefits. First, an overview of the current state of coverage and non-take-up in Europe is presented.

2. Overview of state-of-play of coverage and take-up of Minimum Income schemes at European level

2.1. Main types of MI schemes

At the time of the first EMIN project¹, 28 of 30 participating countries had a minimum income scheme. After the report, Greece and Italy also have introduced Minimum Income schemes. The schemes differ across countries and according to the European Social Policy Network² (ESPN) report, the European Minimum Income schemes can be divided into five main types (Table 1.).

¹ EMIN (2015): Toward adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes in Europe Analysis of Minimum Income Schemes and roadmaps in 30 countries participating in the EMIN project. Synthesis report

² European Social Policy Network (2015): Minimum Income Schemes in Europe. A study of national policies

Table 1. Minimum Income scheme types in Europe

Type	Countries
1) simple and comprehensive schemes open to all with insufficient means to support themselves	BE, CH, CY, CZ, DK, EE, ES [Basque country], FI [Basic Social Assistance], IS, IT [Bolzano, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Molise, Sardegna, Valle d'Aosta] ¹⁵ , LI, LU, NL, NO, SE, SI, SK
2) simple and non-categorical schemes but with rather restricted eligibility and coverage	AT, EL, ES [Asturias, Cantabria, Castile-Leon, Navarre, Rioja], HR, HU, LT, PT, RS
3) General scheme of last resort with additional categorical benefits which cover most people in need of support	DE, FI [Additional Social Assistance], IT [Basilicata, New Social Card, Puglia, Sicilia, Trento], LV, MK, PL, UK
4) Complex network of different, often categorical schemes and sometimes overlapping schemes which cover most people in need of support	FR, IE, MT, RO
5) Very limited, partial or piecemeal schemes which are restricted to narrow categories of people and fail to cover many of these in need of support	BG

2.2. Coverage of the Minimum Income schemes

According to the ESPN study, more than half of countries (BE, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, IE, IS, LI, LU, MT, NL, NO, SE, SI, SK) included in the study provide fairly comprehensive coverage of people at risk of poverty. In eight countries (BG, EL [pilot scheme], ES, HR, IT [Basilicata, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Molise, New Social Card, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia, Valle d'Aosta], LV, PT, RO) coverage is very limited while in the rest of the countries (AT, ES [Basque country], HU, IT(BZ/TN), LT, MK, PL, RS, UK) the schemes cover people partially. Coverage can vary between beneficiaries: in France among those people with a very low income (40 % of median) only half received minimum income. In Serbia and Spain, the coverage differs between regions, resulting in a low coverage in some regions.

The report suggests that most of the countries that have a comprehensive coverage, are characterized as having a simple and comprehensive scheme. Comprehensive coverage can also be achieved by other means: three of four countries with “complex network of different, often categorical schemes and sometimes overlapping schemes which cover most people in need of support”, have comprehensive coverage. Countries that are characterized by a “simple and non-categorical scheme with rather restricted eligibility and coverage” achieve partial or limited coverage. Countries that have a “general scheme of last resort with

additional categorical benefits which cover most people in need of support” attain different levels of coverage: very limited, partial and comprehensive. Since 2009 coverage has improved in eight countries (AT, BE, CY, FI, LU, MT, RS, SI) and decreased in seven (DK, FR, HU, MK, PT, RO, UK). In some countries this is related to harsh eligibility conditions and use of sanctions (e.g. ES, HU, PT, MK, RS, UK).

The ESPN report mentions several groups that are not being adequately covered by the Minimum Income schemes (Table 2.).

Table 2. Groups not adequately covered by the Minimum Income schemes

Groups	Countries
Immigrants and asylum seekers	AT, BE, CH, DE, FR, IE, IS, IT, LI, LU, MT, SE, UK
Undocumented migrants	BE, CH, FI, FR, IT, LU, MT, NO, PT
Refugees	BG, MK
Homeless people and people renting without an agreement	CZ, DE, ES, LV
Working poor	HU, PL, RO
Young people	ES, FR, LU
Students	IS
Young people living in institutions	SK

In the EMIN report it is reported that young people under 25 are not covered by the minimum income in Spain, France and the Netherlands. In Luxembourg people under 25 were not covered even though they lived independently. Low income thresholds were seen a problem that affected coverage in Portugal and Latvia

According to the ESPN report, there are several ways to increase the coverage of Minimum Income. First, simplification of the system may increase coverage in countries that have a complex and fragmented Minimum Income system. Second, countries with a low coverage should reconsider their conditions so that all people are covered. Third, countries that exclude groups that are in vulnerable situations (such as people experiencing homelessness, refugees, and asylum seekers) should consider adjusting their system to cover them better. Fourth, countries with a highly discretionary administrative system, should ensure that there are clear criteria for decision making.

2.3. Non-take-up of Minimum Income

Non-take-up of indicates that a person or a household is eligible for the Minimum Income but for some reason does not claim it. Non-take-up rate is share of people who do not receive the benefit compared to the population that is eligible for the benefit. Non-take-up of benefits implies that the social security scheme does not work efficiently (van Oorschot 1991³). Inefficiency of a scheme suggests that it is not providing benefits to all members.

The need to reduce non-take-up is also recognized by the European Commission⁴ (2015, 3-4). The Commission recommends that Member states should reform their social protection systems to provide effective and efficient social protection. With this modernization, the social protection systems should be more accessible by the people. The European Commission emphasizes that social protection systems should guarantee everyone the right to adequate minimum income schemes for everyone lacking sufficient resources.

According to the Eurofound⁵ study (2015) reducing non-take-up may increase public expenditure in the short run, but in the long run the expenditures may decrease. In some cases, claiming benefits may prevent situations that in the future may have a higher cost. For instance, if people cannot pay for health care services, their health status may deteriorate in the long run resulting in higher public expenditure. Reducing non-take-up may also help countries to achieve their poverty targets (Europe 2020 targets) or at least alleviate poverty in more extreme cases (Kuivalainen 2010⁶).

2.3.1 Estimates of non-take-up in Europe

Measuring non-take-up has been found to be difficult. Even so, there are country studies conducted on the magnitude of non-take-up of social benefits. According to the Eurofound (2015) study, non-take-up is a widespread problem across the Europe as in more than half of the Member States there is evidence of non-take-up. Non-take-up is not restricted to certain benefits but instead there is non-take-up in different benefit types. All the 16 countries included in the analysis, had at least one benefit for which the estimate on non-take-up was more than 40 %. This suggests that non-take-up is an issue that is relevant in all the European countries, regardless of the welfare state type.

³ Van Oorschot (1991): Non-take-up of social security benefits in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol. 1, pp. 15-30.

⁴ European Commission (2015): ANNEX to the Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

⁵ Eurofound (2015), *Access to social benefits: Reducing non-take-up*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁶ Kuivalainen (2010): Köyhä, köyhempi, köyhin? Toimeentulotuen alkäytön yhteys köyhyteen. In *Köyhyys, tulonjako ja eriarvoisuus*.

However, at the same time the ESPN study suggests that the take-up of minimum income is almost complete in eight European countries (BG, DK, EE, IE, IS, MT, NL, SK). Nevertheless, in most countries the take up is only partial. Since 2009 the take-up has increased in six countries (AT, BG, FI, IS, MT, RS) and decreased in six (BE, CY, HU, RO, SI, SK).

According to the ESPN study, in some countries non-take up is not divided equally between potential beneficiaries. The results suggest that non-take-up is highest among the most vulnerable categories (BE, FR). One of the most vulnerable groups are the homeless. The FEANTSA⁷ study states that data on the take-up of the homeless people is hard to come by, but some small surveys or other information are available. These results may provide useful information, even though they may not reflect the national situation accurately. The results imply that in countries where people experiencing homelessness are left to claim for the benefit by themselves, the non-take-up rate is higher. Those people who are experiencing homelessness that were staying in homelessness accommodation have lower non-take-up rate than among rough sleepers or those staying with friends.

2.3.2 Reasons for non-take-up

Several reasons for non-take-up have been suggested. The main reasons can be divided into different levels: the individual level, the scheme level and the level of administration (van Oorschot 1991). Also society has been suggested to be the fourth level affecting take-up of benefits (Eurofound 2015). However, it has been emphasized that in practice the different levels contribute to the non-take-up as a whole and in many cases it might not be possible to pinpoint the reason for non-take-up. At the individual level reasons for non-take-up can be: unawareness of the benefit, unawareness of entitlement, insufficient knowledge of application procedure, fear of stigmatization, attitudes towards dependency on society, process is felt time-consuming and not worth of the effort and personal difficulties such as difficulties filling in the forms or illiteracy (van Oorschot 1991; Eurofound 2015).

At the level of administration, the factors that can contribute to the non-take up are: complex application procedures, procedures that are inaccessible for claimants, poor and erroneous decision-making, slow assessment, limited staff and lack of skills by the staff. The schemes can increase the non-take-up if they are: complex, increase the stigmatization by conditions.

These factors are often interlinked and results from the case studies compiled by the Eurofound (2015) suggest that various reasons for non-take-up may apply to one individual. The Eurofound study suggests that non-take-up among vulnerable groups may be explained by a mix of reasons related to lack of information, costly or complex access and social barriers.

⁷ Natalie Boccadero (2014): Non Take Up of Minimum Income Schemes among the Homeless Population, Final Thematic Report, FEANTSA,

Another way to investigate non-take-up is to use the typology developed by Odenore⁸ and used in the study by FEANTSA (2014). Here non-take-up is seen as rights that are not taken because: they are unknown, unclaimed, unobtained and discarded by someone between the client and administration.

Unknown rights and the lack of communication

In most countries included in the EMIN report, non-take-up mainly occurs because individuals do not know about the existence of Minimum Income scheme or do not know how to claim it. In some countries it was seen that the claimants should be responsible for finding the relevant information regarding the benefit and claiming it. Also the complexity of the Minimum Income scheme may lead to a higher non-take up rates. These examples the interlinkage between individual level and scheme level reasons for non-take-up.

Unclaimed rights and offer relevancy

This type of non-take-up refers to situation where the beneficiary knows he/she is entitled to the benefit but decides not to claim it. For example, there might be costs connected to the claiming of the benefit that may exceed the amount of the benefit. These costs can take different forms: they can be financial, material, cognitive, physical or psychological. Material and cognitive costs are related to filling in the forms, complex procedures and many documents required. Physical costs are related to not accessing the services in the rural areas, while psychological costs are to do with stigma and shame.

If rights are unclaimed by choice, they are according to the report related to conditions of the Minimum Income scheme. These conditions included activation measures, means-testing, controlling or putting conditions for receiving the benefit. In some countries the role of the social worker was the reason for non-take-up. The controlling and accompanying role of the social worker was seen as problematic.

Unobtained rights and administrative obstacles

According to the report, unobtained rights refer to situations, where applicants have claimed for the benefit but gave up the process. This was mainly due to administrative issues such as poor working administration and strong discretionary elements in the system. Also in some countries introducing additional, complex procedures and making arbitrary rejections were

⁸ Observatoire des non-recours aux droits et aux services, IEP Grenoble, France

linked to non-take-up. In some countries demands of permanent address posed problems for homeless people.

Discarded rights and the opinion of social intermediaries

This type of non-take-up is related to the intermediaries (such as social workers, NGOs etc.) discouraging the potential beneficiaries to claim for the benefit. The national reports of the EMIN project did not find any examples of this kind of procedures. However, it was pointed that these intermediaries may improve the take-up by providing information and guidance to the benefits.

2.3.3. Suggestions to reduce non-take-up

In the EMIN report, countries have made recommendations on how to reduce non-take-up. These include automatic granting of rights, simplification of the system, faster administrative procedures, outreaching to the communities, qualified social workers who inform people about the rights to the Minimum Income, establishment of one-stop-shops, better coordination between administrations, introducing a case-manager and separating the social work from its controlling functions.

In the FEANTSA report similar suggestions on reducing non-take-up have been put forward:

- Information campaigns
- Pro-active administration to look for potential beneficiaries
- Simplify application procedures and provide assistance in filling the forms
- Flexibility in proving eligibility
- Standardized rules to reduce uncertainty in claiming process
- Establishing easily accessible appeal procedures
- Increase the coordination between different social security programs
- Developing one-shop-stops
- Considering the effects of tax reforms
- More data and research on non-take-up

Suggestions were also made in the Eurofound (2015) report. These will be presented in the next section.

3. Peer review in Helsinki 13.-14. March 2018

On 13.-14. March a Peer Review of coverage and non-take-up was organized. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together country representatives to share their experiences on non-take-up of Minimum Income and to generate ideas on how non-take-up could be reduced. The meeting included presentations from six countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia Finland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and the UK) and Eurofound. Besides that, two working groups were organized to draw suggestions to tackle non-take-up. This chapter describes the content of the meeting.

3.1. Information provided by the speakers

Access to social benefits: reducing non-take-up, Anna Ludwinek, Eurofound⁹

According to Eurofound's study (2015) non-take-up is a significant problem across countries. It is problematic because it creates inequalities between those who take up the benefit and those who do not. Another problem is that the benefits fail to fulfil their aims. Non-take-up can also trigger larger social expenditure in the long run. If non-take-up is considered as an issue, there is a possibility that it leads to misguided reforms. Reducing non-take-up is important in the framework of recent European policy programmes, including the European semester. Non-take-up is an issue in all the benefits, not only in Minimum Income benefits.

In the Eurofound report, risk factors of non-take-up were analyzed at four levels: administration, benefit scheme, individual and society. The different levels are interlinked and for example complexity may be an issue in all the levels. At administrative level, it may be that application procedures are complex and people may be experiencing difficulties in filling the forms. Complexity may occur in the scheme level if the entitlement criteria are complex and people are not sure whether they have a right to the benefit. At the individual level complexity may cause non-take-up if people lack the time or do not understand the application process. At the societal level, low internet penetration may restrict the people of using simplified application systems.

According to Eurofound, several initiatives have been put forward (see more Eurofound 2015) to reduce non-take-up. At the administrative level, non-take-up could be reduced by simplifying procedures and providing simple information about the benefit. In Belgium and in the Netherlands information on how to improve the system is gathered from those who had not taken up the benefit. Stigmatizing assessment has been aimed to be reduced in Finland and Estonia. In Finland, this has been done by centralizing the basic social assistance, whereas

⁹[EUROFOUND study on coverage and take-up](#)

in Estonia self-service portals for the unemployed have been established. Proactive benefit systems instead would make applications redundant. Benefits could be initiated automatically, based on register data. Life events (such as job loss, child birth) could be registered in databases so that when they occur, service providers would get the information.

At the scheme level, simple, transparent and stable entitlement criteria may have positive impacts on take-up. If entitlement criteria change between regions or municipalities, specific information is needed. In order to reduce non-take-up, the benefit systems should be stable. Repeated changes to the benefits make it more difficult for people to be aware of the entitlement criteria. Stigma can be reduced by giving the benefit a clear name.

There are several ways to reduce non-take-up by focusing on the individual level. For example, NGOs who work with groups with a high non-take-up, may partner up with public organizations to reach the people who do not claim the benefits. Public bodies could also cooperate with other public organizations in order to reduce non-take-up. Providing information on the benefits can be done through social networks, as in many cases word-to-mouth dissemination is effective. Reaching out is important and for example social workers may reach groups of people that otherwise might be hard to reach. Press and social media can also be utilized in reaching the people.

Non-take-up can also be reduced at the societal level. Introducing online benefit applications and automated assessment may lead to lower levels of non-take-up. For this, improving access to the internet across countries is needed. At the same time, multiple channels of claiming must be provided, to ensure that people without access to the internet have the possibility of claiming the benefit.

Raising awareness on non-take-up at the societal level may lead to lower levels of non-take-up. Broader awareness among the public may reduce stigma and also may help people realizing that non-take-up is an issue in their immediate circles. Here media can be used to provide information on the issue of non-take-up and groups that are affected by this.

Raising awareness among policymakers may lead to including non-take-up in the assessment of social policies. Greater awareness among policymakers may influence the design of the benefits. Many civil society actors have good channels for reaching the vulnerable population groups but they may not be aware that non-take-up is an issue. Engaging civil society to reduce non-take-up could be reached by information campaigns that provide information on the scale of non-take-up but also ways of identifying the individuals who potentially are not taking up the benefits they are entitled to.

Finnish efforts to simplify benefit systems and reduce non-take-up, Olli Kangas, KELA, Finland¹⁰

Social assistance in Finland consists of three different systems that have different criteria. The basic social assistance is automatically paid to those clients who fulfil the formal criteria, the additional allowance is for special additional costs and preventive assistance is paid after careful means-and needs-testing. Since the beginning of 2017, basic social assistance has been paid centrally by the Social Insurance Institution (Kela), whereas it was previously paid by the municipalities. The additional and preventive assistance are still administered by the municipalities. The central reasons for the transfer were simplification of the system, equal treatment of recipients and reducing non-take-up. Before the reform, non-take-up was estimated to be between 25 to 40 %. After the reform, the number of social assistance receivers was 17 % higher than before the reform (ca. 277 000 in 2017 and 237 000 in 2016). This would indicate that non-take-up has decreased. At the same time, there have been delays in the decision making and in some cases the decisions have taken longer than is the requirement (7 days). According to the presentation, adequacy of the minimum income might be a bigger problem than non-take-up. The level of social assistance has decreased during the 2000s and is only 40 % of the AROP-threshold in 2015.

Eligible for the benefit are those with insufficient income. Asylum seekers staying in refugee centres are eligible to reduced amounts of benefits. EU-citizens who have stayed in Finland less than three months are not entitled to assistance. After three months they are entitled to additional social assistance and only on temporary basis. When foreign citizens have received the permanent residence status they are eligible for assistance. However, in urgent cases social assistance must be provided for everybody.

The Finnish social security system has not followed any master plan but instead it has been constructed gradually. This means that the system can be complicated to the claimants. Efforts have been made to simplify the system. There are different possibilities to simplify the complicated social security system, including by introducing a basic income, a negative income tax, a participation income, a universal credit or through smaller steps to homogenize benefit levels and regulations. The Finnish government has launched a basic income experiment during 2017 and 2018. During the experiment, a random sample of 2,000 unemployed will receive 560 € of unconditional basic income per month without means testing. A follow-up study about the experiment will be conducted by Kela.

¹⁰ [Finnish efforts to simplify benefit systems and reduce non-take-up](#)

Social Security and Benefit take-up, Kirsten Sweeney, Communication manager of the Social Security Directorate, Scottish Government¹¹

Scotland is launching its first own social benefits in the summer of 2018. The Scottish government puts strong emphasis that social security is a human right and wants to support that people exercise their right for the Minimum Income. Currently 500 000 people are not taking the benefits they are entitled to. The Scottish government has spent 300 000 £ to increase benefit take-up. Media campaigns, including radio, TV, press and social media, are used to reduce stigma and increase the take-up of social benefits. Campaigns are targeted both to the general public and specific target groups. The Scottish government has introduced an inclusive approach on designing the benefits, as people (Experience Panel of 2 400 people) who have previously received benefits are included in the process. For designing the benefits, different target groups are involved. For example, for designing the Young Carer's allowance, young people are involved. Here, the attention is paid that the information provided is understandable for the young people. In the future, an analysis of benefit take-up is done to identify key target groups and identifying the measures of success of the approach.

Katherine Duffy and Colin Hampton, UK ^{12 13}

In the UK, the government is introducing a Universal Credit that replaces six current benefits (Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Working Tax Credit). The new benefit is introduced in stages throughout the country. In December 2017 there were 700 000 people on the Universal Credit. In the whole nation, the new scheme will be available for new claimants in 2019 and in 2022 for existing claimants.

People aged 18-65 with insufficient income are eligible for the benefit. The means-tested benefit is paid to people in paid work and for those not employed. For those who are working, the benefit is decreased by 63 % for every earned pound.

The benefit is paid on a monthly basis with a minimum waiting period of 5 weeks for the first payment. Conditionality criteria are stricter for many more groups than in the previous benefits. People receiving the benefit are assumed to spend 35 hours per week on job search and complete an on-line information and communication journal on their activities. People with disabilities and care responsibilities are excluded from this. Sanctions for not fulfilling

¹¹ [Efforts in Scotland to improve take-up through campaigns](#)

¹² [UK experiences on non-take-up of social benefits](#)

¹³ [Walking the Tightrope of Benefit Sanctions](#)

the conditions are included: people not fulfilling their commitments may be excluded from the benefit for a certain time or their benefit can be reduced.

There is no information on the non-take-up of Universal Credit. However, there are estimates for non-take-up of the benefits preceding Universal Credit. For Income Support the non-take-up is 20 %, for Job Seekers Allowance 40 % and for Housing Benefit 20 %. According to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the potential reasons for non-take-up are unawareness of the benefit, lack of knowledge on the application procedure, unawareness of entitlement criteria and attractiveness of the benefit. Non-take-up could be reduced by providing multiple channels for benefit claiming, providing better information on the entitlement criteria, simplifying the entitlement criteria and providing better training and more resources for the staff.

Josée Goris, Arne Proesmans and Ria Szeker, Belgium¹⁴

The Belgian Minimum Income scheme is based on social rights that aim to assure citizens a life in dignity. Eligible are those who reside in Belgium, are at least 18 years old and have income below the minimum income amount. Furthermore, the claimants are assumed to be ready to work and have taken up their other social rights. Some studies have been done about the non-take-up of benefits. The non-take-up of minimum income is high as it is estimated to vary from 57 % to 76 %. Several reasons for non-take-up have been suggested. The claimants may not claim the benefits as they may have negative experiences or have felt stigmatized in the past. There might also be difficulties in claiming the benefits, as procedures are complex, rules are changing often and benefits may not be accessible. Take-up could be increased at the scheme level by providing information for the possible claimants, drafting manuals for the local staff or outreaching to the public. At the administrative level, take-up could be increased by automatizing the social rights. Actions have been taken to reduce non-take-up. The Crossroads Bank for Social Security provides a tool for administrations to communicate and ensure that people have taken up their rights. The Only Once legislation instead prohibits the public institutions asking the citizens for data that they already possess.

Douhomir Minev, Aleksandar Nikolov and Temenuzha Zlatanova, Bulgaria

In Bulgaria the Minimum Income scheme covers people only partially. Persons with an income below a certain standard, who are registered at the Employment Services and are available

¹⁴ [Belgian case on take-up](#)

for the job market, are eligible for the benefit. Also a residence is a precondition as the Minimum Income is provided at the municipal level.

The benefits are of low level and beneficiaries must attend a public work system. The system of Minimum Income is discretionary as social workers are in charge of the decision making. This results in a high share of rejected applications. The level of non-take-up differs between studies: in some studies there are signs of high non-take-up and in some the non-take-up is low. At the moment, the government is preparing for a new law that would change the system of minimum income completely.

Zdenko Babic, Katica Lazeta and Danijela Baturina, Croatia¹⁵

Croatia has a national Minimum Income Scheme which is called Guaranteed Minimum Benefit (GMB). GMB is meant to cover the basic needs of a household that does not have the income to fulfil these needs. The amount of GMB for a single person (106 €/month) is low and is only 37 % of the AROP-threshold in Croatia. Only 12 % of those under the poverty threshold are eligible for the benefit. The system is characterized by very strict conditions in means testing. The result of this is that many poor people are excluded from the Minimum Income Scheme. Social workers have the discretionary power to reject the application if the claimant possess a car for example. Often the administrative approach is more focused on sanctions which may lead to some claimants neglecting their right to Minimum income and resulting in non-take-up.

The non-take-up could be reduced by a more flexible means testing that takes into consideration the living situation of the claimant. Non-take-up could also be reduced by providing clear information about the benefit, reaching out to the community, automatizing the right to GMB by data linking and organizing campaigns to change the public's attitudes towards the recipients of the GMB. The coverage of minimum income could be increased by increasing the level of GMB.

Sandra Faria Araujo, Rute Guerra and Carlos Farinha Rodrigues, Portugal¹⁶

In Portugal the Minimum Income scheme (Social Insertion Income, SII) was established in 1996. To qualify for the benefit, the income must be below a given standard (186,68 € for a single person). Persons must be residing in Portugal and be over 18 years to be eligible for the

¹⁵ [Croatian experiences on coverage and non-take-up](#)

¹⁶ [Coverage and non-take-up in Portugal](#)

benefit. Furthermore, the claimants must be enrolled in the Employment Center and sign an integration contract that requires the applicant to be available for work and training.

There is no exact data of non-take-up but according to some estimates the non-take-up of Minimum Income is approximately 35 %. Some reasons for non-take-up are gathered from interviews. A significant reason for non-take-up is stigma, as there are prejudices against the beneficiaries of SII. Another reason is that procedures are complex and many claimants do not receive guidance in claiming the benefit. Third, some people may not be eligible for the benefit as they cannot register for the Employment Center whereas others find the requirement to participate in the training courses futile. Fourth, as permanent residence is needed, homeless people are not eligible for the benefit. Several suggestions have been put forward to reduce non-take-up, including breaking prejudices against the beneficiaries, awareness raising campaigns in the public to reduce stigmatizations and faster access to the benefits. Publication of statistical information, monitoring and evaluation of the benefit system should be carried out on a regular basis.

Graciela Malgesini, Ana Boy Fernandez and Javier Perez, Spain¹⁷

The Spanish Minimum Income scheme is a hybrid of national, regional and local arrangements. Mainly operating at the regional level, the Spanish schemes have differences in conditions, durations and amounts of the benefits. The regional programs have in common that they aim to cover the basic needs of the households with insufficient resources. Also there are minimum requirements of residence in the schemes.

There are some issues related to Minimum Income schemes. In many regions there are difficulties for people accessing the benefit, even if they would be entitled to the benefit. There are also problems with decision making as applications are not processed quickly. In many regions, applications are rejected without justifying the decisions. The process was felt time consuming in many regions as the claimants needed to provide lots of documentation for the application.

There are also issues related to coverage. Homeless people are not eligible for the benefit as permanent residence is required. Persons moving to other regions may not be covered by the regional schemes if they are missing minimum requirement of proofed local residence. In many regions this is one year. In many cases immigrants are not eligible for the minimum income schemes. Young people under the age of 25 are also excluded in many regions from the benefits.

¹⁷ [Coverage and non-take-up in Spain](#)

Several reasons for non-take-up have been identified. The most typical reason for non-take-up is that documentation requirements are so complex that people are not able to present them. Significant factors increasing non-take-up are also fear of stigma and unawareness of a right to the benefit. In many cases, non-take-up was seen as result of complex procedures.

There are several suggestions on how to improve coverage and non-take-up. The right to Minimum Income should be portable, so that when people move to a new region, they would not lose their right to Minimum Income. More flexibility is needed in granting of the Minimum Income in order to reach the people in most vulnerable situations. A set of different approaches are needed to reach undocumented migrants, homeless people and the Roma people, as their legal situation may differ. Non-take-up could also be reduced by outreaching: going to schools and soup kitchens may increase the likelihood of people taking up their benefits. Furthermore, attention also should be paid to that the forms are of simple language.

3.2. Discussions in the working groups

Two working groups were organized to draw suggestions on how to improve take-up and coverage. Inspired by the study of Eurofound (2015), the working groups adopted a four-level framework on initiatives in reducing non-take-up: administrative level, scheme level, individual level and societal level.

3.2.1 Administrative level

Information on the benefits must be provided

A detailed information about the benefit should be provided for the people. The information can be provided online on the website of the public authority. Besides providing information on the benefit, the website could help the public on how to navigate the social security system. Guides and FAQs should be provided both online and on paper. Information may also be provided by social workers outreaching to the community or by NGOs which work with people in vulnerable situations.

Well trained staff with adequate resources is key

The staff of the public authorities has a very important role in reducing non-take-up. The people working in the public offices should assist people in claiming the benefit. In some countries the social workers are weighed down and they have no time to provide guidance on claiming for the Minimum Income. Thus, it is important that the offices are provided with

adequate resources to be able to assist the claimants. What is also of importance is that the staff is well trained regards to the Minimum Income system.

Decisions fast, with possibility to revise and complain

In some countries the applicants have to wait a long time before they receive the decision. This is a problem especially if the Minimum Income is the only benefit that the household receives. In these cases, decisions and payment should be received fast. For example in Finland, the decisions on the Minimum Income must be received in seven working days. People should also be given the possibility to revise their application and file a complaint on the decision. For assisting people with complaints, a position for an ombudsman should be established.

Data linking and automatization of rights

ICT services offer many choices in reducing non-take-up. For this, databases and solutions on checking the entitlement are needed. With data-linking it would be possible to identify households with a low income and direct them to claim the benefit. However, it is important that the systems use real-time information on the household income. Currently these real-time registers are being developed in Croatia and in Finland. At the same time, the systems should not be intrusive as privacy of the people must be respected. One step forward would be the automatization of rights, in which even applications are not needed. Where possible, Minimum Income benefits should be granted automatically, based on information that is already available in the administration, or by crossing of data bases

Coordination between services

Coordination between services may have positive implications for non-take-up. If the public authorities working with Minimum Income co-operate with other public authorities or NGOs, it increases the possibility of identifying the persons not taking up the benefits. A checklist on social security benefits should be provided for persons or agencies working with people in vulnerable situations. These could include general practitioners and nurses.

Research on the system

Central to the issue of non-take-up is to analyze what works. More research is needed on the good practices that increase the take-up of Minimum Income. Also pin-pointing the strengths and weaknesses of the system may increase take-up.

3.2.2. Benefit design

In general, it is important to foresee the necessary resources to develop, design and monitor the systems. Participation of people who have experienced poverty, for example through experience panels like in Scotland, can improve the design of the benefit system. It is important to look at the design of the entire welfare system, not only of the minimum income benefits.

Increasing the coverage and level of Minimum Income

Both groups expressed the concern that the amount of Minimum Income is too low. For example in Croatia, the Minimum Income does not cover even the food costs of the households (Goedemé, Storms, Penne & Van den Bosch 2015¹⁸). It has been found in the previous research that low level of benefits is likely to cause non-take-up (e.g. Gustafsson 2002¹⁹). On the other hand, take-up is likely to rise when the level of benefit increases (Lemieux & Milligan 2008²⁰).

In many other countries the threshold for minimum income is low, excluding many poor people from the benefit. Raising the threshold would mean that more people would be eligible for the benefit, and thus would increase the coverage of Minimum Income among the poor people. Increasing the coverage could also decrease stigma, as more people would be eligible for the benefit. For assessing the level of Minimum Income, a benchmark is needed at EU level, based not only on the AROP-threshold, but also on reference budgets

Coverage of the Minimum Income can also be increased by removing the requirements that the claimant has a physical address. This would mean that also people experiencing homelessness were covered by the Minimum Income scheme. In Belgium, the use of an administrative address enables homeless people to claim for the Minimum Income even though they are lacking a permanent address.

Minimum Income based on rights with flexible and enabling elements

Minimum Income should be seen as a right for the people. First of all, the right to Minimum Income should be based on law. At the same time, legalism should be avoided as social workers should have discretionary power to take into account individual circumstances. On

¹⁸ Goedemé, Storms, Penne & Van den Bosch (2015): Pilot project for the development of a common methodology on reference budgets in Europe. The development of a methodology for comparable reference budgets in Europe – Final report of the pilot project. European Commission

¹⁹ Gustafsson (2002): Assessing non-use of social assistance. European Journal of Social Work, vol. 5, pp. 149-158.

²⁰ Lemieux & Milligan (2008): Incentive effects of social assistance: A regression discontinuity approach. Journal of Econometrics, vol. 142, pp. 807-828.

the other hand, too much discretionary power may be a problem. To address this problem, social workers should utilize their discretionary power only when granting supplementary benefits, to top up the basic Minimum Income benefits that are legally established. This would enable to take into account the actual situation of the families. Flexibility and discretion should be preferred over strict means testing in cases where people are denied the right to Minimum Income due to small possessions, such as an old car. Minimum Income system should not be punitive, but instead emancipatory activation and enablement should be emphasized. Social inclusion should be seen more broadly than just labour market integration. Linking Minimum Income receipt to school attendance of children should not be used in a punitive way, but only as means to support vulnerable groups.

Benefits and means-testing

The objective of the benefit system should be that people are not dependent on the benefit for a long time. The objective of means testing should not be punishment of the people and impoverish them, but to enable them to improve their living situation. A balance between means testing and access to the scheme should be established.

Family composition should be taken into account in means testing to avoid creating tensions in the family. This is especially important when parents risk losing their entitlement to Minimum Income once their children become entitled. Also the housing situation may pose problems. In some countries, people have to sell their house to be eligible for the benefit, even though there are no buyers. In these cases, the house may not be sold and people are not eligible for the Minimum Income. Co-housing, but not sharing a household is a problem as well, that may lead to lowering benefit levels.

Benefits should be accessible

In both working groups it was mentioned that the Minimum Income schemes should be accessible to all people in need. Here, it was stressed that several channels for claiming the benefit should be established. Relying just on one channel may not be accessible for all the claimants. Granting benefits via online services may decrease stigma that is related to the Minimum Income. It is also important that the public offices are accessible for the people who are working. In these cases, longer office hours would enable employed people to access the services. If claiming benefits relies heavily on online procedures, there should be clear instructions on how to use the service or application. Claiming for the benefits should not be costly to the claimants. If claiming causes significant costs (material, physical or physiological), non-take-up is likely to be higher. One example of cost-reduction is that the claimants should only be required to provide information that is absolutely necessary to assess the application.

For example in Galicia, Spain, claimants need to present their bank transfers from the last 12 months.

One way to increase accessibility is to develop a system with easy accessibility and low requirements that cover the basic needs. On top of this basic floor, a more supportive system with the objective to enhance social integration could be established. In the latter system, more discretionary measures could be used.

Towards more simple system

If Minimum Income schemes exist at the national, regional and local level, people may have difficulties in applying for the right benefit. In these cases, moving in to a unitary system might reduce non-take-up. Moreover, simple and transparent entitlement criteria are important in reducing non-take-up. This means that it should be clearly stated who are eligible for the benefit and what the conditions are. Decisions must be clear and provide explicit reasons why the application was rejected. This way the applicant knows the reasons for the rejection and can reapply if the situation changes. For designing the benefits, the information possessed by the current beneficiaries can be useful. The people currently receiving benefits know in many cases what works and what does not work. This would produce a more customer-friendly Minimum Income scheme.

It is also important to look beyond the Minimum Income scheme and scrutinize the whole social security system. The social security systems need to be more agile and simple so that when people move between social security statutes (unemployed, sick, social assistance), gaps would not occur. For this, more coordination between benefits is needed.

Simple language

In many countries, people claiming for the benefit have to fill several complex forms with complex language. This may lead to non-take-up of Minimum Income. Special attention should be paid to that the forms are drawn up with language that is not bureaucratic, but understandable for the claimants. In designing the applications forms, input of former claimants can be utilized. If the benefit is targeted to a specific group, such as young people, the people of that group should be involved in designing the application forms.

3.2.3. Societal level

Changing the attitudes of the public

In many countries there is stigma related to claiming Minimum Income. Main reason for this is that the Minimum Income is targeted to people in vulnerable situations. Reducing stigma can decrease non-take-up. Here investments are needed to organize public awareness campaigns can be used to change the attitudes of the public. More publicity about the Minimum Income is needed not just through media but also in schools, medical services, social media, social organizations and NGOs.

It is important to stress that anyone can become dependent on the Minimum Income and it is acceptable to claim it. It should also be stressed that Minimum Income is not charity, but everyone is entitled to the Minimum Income when they need it and for as long as they need it. Renaming the benefit can also have stigma reducing effects, which eventually can lead to lower non-take-up.

Increasing internet penetration

On societal level, governments should increase the internet penetration so that accessing Internet is possible all around the country. This is especially important if claiming and all the information related to Minimum Income are online. Bad internet connections are likely to increase the non-take up.

4. Conclusions and recommendations by the Peer Review

According to the European Commission (2015), the social protection systems should be designed so that everyone entitled to the benefit, also claims it. According to the results of the Eurofound (2015) study, non-take-up is a significant issue around the Member States of the European Union, regardless of the social security system. Non-take-up is not related to only Minimum Income Schemes but is an issue for other benefits as well.

According to the Peer Review, the reasons for non-take-up are similar across countries. In many cases, non-take-up happens because people are unaware that the benefit exists and unaware that they would be entitled to it. Experiences from the participating countries also suggest that there are complex procedures in claiming the Minimum Income and in many cases heavy stigma. However, often there could be several reasons for non-take-up or the reasons can be intertwined. Many of the issues can be tackled at the administrative level but also benefit design matters.

The Peer Review has established some recommendations based on country experiences and the Eurofound study on how to reduce non-take-up. First, Minimum Income schemes that are **adequate and accessible** are more likely to receive higher levels of take-up. This would mean that the Minimum Income scheme is of decent standard and provides an easy access for the claimants.

Secondly, the schemes need **simplification**. This means that the entitlement criteria must be simple and transparent, procedures are simple and also the language used in application is simple and understandable to the people. For example in Scotland, special attention is paid to that the information is understandable for the claimants and that the forms are drawn in simple language. In Finland, the social security system is simplified by launching a basic income experiment.

Raising awareness has a dual role in reducing non-take-up. Raising awareness about the Minimum Income among the public may change how the public sees the recipients of the Minimum Income. This may have stigma reducing effects which may eventually lead to lower levels of non-take-up. Besides that, a greater awareness can also increase the take-up among those who were eligible to the benefit, but unaware that it exists. In Scotland, campaigns with several different media channels are organized to increase take-up of social benefits and to reduce stigma.

Co-operation between the Minimum Income administration and other agencies may have positive effects in reducing non-take-up. As mentioned earlier, co-operation can take different forms from providing information about the Minimum Income to identifying the people eligible for the benefit. For example in Belgium, the Crossroads Bank for Social Security

enables administrations to communicate with each other and help to ensure that people have taken up their rights for the benefits.

Some of the suggestions may require more **resources** to build new **infrastructure**. Resources are needed for designing and monitoring the benefit system. Providing resources for social workers to outreach to the community can create a new kind of service infrastructure and help people realizing their right to Minimum Income. Creating ICT solutions to identify the people who are not taking up their benefits can also be of use in reducing non-take-up. In Croatia and Finland, real-time income registers are developed that could help administrations to identify the people who are eligible for the Minimum Income.

Even though increased coverage and take-up may lead to rising social expenditure in the short term, there are incentives for governments to react to these issues. In the longer run, increased coverage and take-up may lead to lower public costs, alleviate poverty in the extreme cases and help governments to reach their EU2020 poverty targets.

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