

# Morocco's new Social Registry: implementation and challenges

Larabi Jaïdi, Policy Center for the New South and João Pedro Dytz, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

## Overview of Morocco's existing system and weaknesses

Morocco's Single Social Registry (*Registre Social Unifié*—RSU) is being lauded as a central tool for the future of social protection in the country; according to the King's Speech of 2020, the RSU will start operating in 2021. Today, Morocco has many systems used as registries, such as its Civil Registry and the Medical Assistance Registry (*Registre d'assistance médicale*—RAMED), which was notably used for the COVID-19 response for informal workers (Jaïdi 2020) and expanded to contain information on households that had to take active steps to register for emergency aid.

However, these registries present some issues: although there are many of them, with much of the population registered, none are able to carry out the satisfactory selection and identification of beneficiaries for social programmes. The lack of a unified identifier is an issue that has been highlighted in the existing system, in addition to certain questions regarding data protection and the use of biometric data—even though Morocco has a robust legal framework and a National Control Commission for the Protection of Personal Data (*Commission nationale de protection des données personnelles*—CNDP).

## The RSU's objectives

The RSU is being implemented as a solution to many of the existing weaknesses of Morocco's social protection system: it should harmonise data collection and concentrate data in one single place through a unique identification number and using biometric data. The selection and identification of beneficiaries will, therefore, be channelled through the RSU, which requires the creation of a new institutional structure: the RSU will use data from the newly formed National Population Registry (*Registre national de la population*—RNP), concentrating information on potential beneficiaries, and will be administered by the recently created National Registry Agency (*Agence nationale des registres*—ANR). These have already been instituted by law; however, they still need to be operationalised by 2021.

The primary goal of this institutional structure is to improve the efficiency of social spending through more precise identification mechanisms that could reduce exclusion errors—but they might focus on inclusion errors instead. It will probably use a proxy means-testing approach for the selection of beneficiaries, accompanying a revamp of the social protection landscape to expand access to family allowances and public medical insurance. Therefore, the RSU is conceived as a driver of the future of social protection in Morocco, allowing for a better understanding of social protection beneficiaries and the impacts of cash transfers.

## The RSU's challenges and weaknesses

Following the adoption of Draft Law 72-18 (on the RSU), some important monitoring institutions have raised issues about its implementation. In its observations and recommendations sent to Morocco's Chamber of Representatives, the National Human Rights Council (*Conseil national des droits de l'Homme*—CNDH) has cast doubts on the practical advantages of targeting vulnerable groups for social protection. In particular, it indicated that the RSU should have the convergence of programmes into an integrated system of public policy as a goal.

For the CNDH, one of the most important aspects of an integrated social protection policy is to include and transform 'support programmes' into an integrated system—which might be outside the RSU's current scope. In this regard, there is a lack of inclusion of homeless people or those without a stable residence, since this information is needed for inclusion in the RSU. Similarly, according to the country's Economic, Social and Environmental Council (*Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental*—CESE), the new law references parts of the Statut Personnel (the equivalent of Family Law), a text that has many issues on gender equality and contradicts rights guaranteed to women by the Moroccan Constitution.

Another important issue regarding the RSU's draft legislation is data protection for those registered. The CNDP's recommendations also focused on separating data for authentication from data to be used by programmes run by different entities—which might go against the ANR's rules. Similarly, the CNDH and the CESE cast doubts on the quality of data protection, and a mechanism for submitting complaints and obtaining legal redress for registered individuals would be required to safeguard individual rights.

The RSU's implementation is being considered by national actors as the next step for Morocco's social protection policy; it should be able to gather data on most of its potential beneficiaries. However, it is important not to lose sight of the importance of using it as a tool to improve the integration of programmes and sectors related to social protection, despite the imperfection of targeting mechanisms. Because it is a 'Single' Registry, the RSU needs to be inclusive, and it has to ensure the safety of its users' data as it rolls out in 2021.

## Reference:

Jaïdi, L. 2020. "Le Registre social unique – Enjeux et défis." *Policy Paper*, July. Rabat: Policy Center for the New South.