

Distr.: General
14 November 2023

English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Measuring Poverty and Inequality

Geneva, Switzerland, 28-29 November 2023

Agenda item: Disaggregation for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Going beyond averages

To better understand and measure great poverty

Note by Insee, France

Abstract

The starting point of the project is the program carried out as part of participatory international research on « the hidden dimensions of poverty », published in 2019 and conducted by the ATD Fourth World Movement and the University of Oxford, jointly in 6 countries¹.

¹ <https://www.atd-quartmonde.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Hidden-Dimensions-of-Poverty-20-11-2019.pdf>

Project objectives and methodological approach

The project is the result of a partnership between ATD-Quart-Monde (ATD), the Secours Catholique (SCCF) and the French Statistical Office (Insee), conducted in 2022, with a view to better understand and measure great poverty and more specifically some hidden dimensions.

The project is based on the active participation of people having an experience of poverty ; it aims at identifying how the tools used by Insee to measure poverty are consistent with the experiences of people that are actually living poverty day by day. Some local groups of people experiencing poverty have been formed, coordinated by animators from the associations with an approach that promotes trust and active participation of people. The project is punctuated by regular meetings of local groups and three plenary meetings with everyone.

The project is divided in two phases:

- phase 1: build a base of knowledge and common benchmarks to define poverty. Starting from people's experiences to look at poverty, and discovering the research on the dimensions of poverty, always linking them to the experiences of the participants. This appropriation phase is necessary to create a common culture and shared knowledge before entering into a constructive and substantiated dialogue with Insee representatives.
- phase 2: specific work on two dimensions: “social isolation” and “institutional mistreatment”, with a view to identify common points and divergences between Insee tools and people’s experience

Phase 1: The different dimensions of poverty and its relationships

On 5th February 2022, a plenary meeting has been organised to launch the project. The objectives was to gather all participants to the project, to begin to get to know each other, and to have a first approach of the dimensions of poverty.

A first exercise was to ask each people to note on a post-it one word that represents for each person the word « poverty ». Three groups of words have emerged: (i) system and domination; (ii) privations ; (iii) ignorance and misunderstanding. Other concepts positive (solidarity, muddling through), negative (isolation, misery) or ambiguous (surviving, struggle, fight) were also mentioned. Then, the group watched a short video presenting the resultats of the international

study on the hidden dimensions of poverty. Finally, the representatives of Insee presented the role and the main missions of the national statistical office.

Then, local groups came back home and worked within their respective groups on deepening their understanding and analysis of poverty. Specific animation techniques were used, such as building an analysis from a lived experience, identifying the characteristics of poverty through a person's silhouette, or working on a spiral analysis to understand what brings people into or out of poverty.

Very rich discussions took place among the local groups, and a restitution was made at a plenary meeting on 1st April 2022. In particular, mainly non-monetary determinants of poverty were reported by the local groups : social isolation, fear, pain, the gaze of others, trust in ourselves or in other people, institutional abuse, dependency to other's people decision, fight, violence, fatigue, mental and physical health, impossibility of planning. The importance of being part of a social network has been many times identified as a key element of the positive spiral. Another important element was the systemic approach, with very close links and interactions between the different dimensions of poverty.

At the plenary meeting, the representatives of Insee also presented to the group the formal indicators of the poverty, such as the monetary poverty rate, or the poverty rate in living conditions.

Phase 2: Deepening two dimensions: social isolation and institutional abuse

During the second phase, local groups have worked on two specific dimensions: social isolation and institutional abuse. Several working sessions have taken place at the local level, with the following objectives: (i) identifying characteristics of poverty in terms of social isolation or institutional abuse ; (ii) comparing these results with the questions of Insee's surveys on those thematic, so as to identify convergences but also differences and missing points.

- The characteristics of social isolation identified by local groups were mostly about the lack of relationships with family (in particular difficult experiences during childhood) and with friends, the existence of social network with associations, the rejection of loved ones, the defense mechanisms which lead to auto-exclusion, the ambiguous effects of addictions, the violence of the exclusion.

- For institutional abuse, local groups considered there is a strong link with the other dimensions, with a formation of a vicious circle. Characteristics of institutional abuse are mainly

the lack of recognition of the competencies (in particular experiencing of volunteering), the judgment and disregard, the dependency to other people's decisions, the difficulty of access (digitalization), or the interference with private life.

Overall, the questionnaires of Insee have been considered as relevant on many issues, but not sufficiently complete to cover all characteristics mentioned above.

The project has been concluded on a final day of plenary meeting on 24 June 2022 in the premises of Insee, with all the participants of local groups, the representatives of the associations, 3 workers from Credoc (<https://www.credoc.fr/>), and around ten Insee agents from the Department of Living Conditions of Households, including the Head of Department.

During this day, Insee has presented two recent studies on social isolation² and administrative procedures³, and the group of people experiencing poverty have presented the results of their work on those two dimensions. Then, mixed workshops between Insee agents, associations and people experiencing poverty took place to try to pool together the two approaches.

As a conclusion, some work avenues have then been identified in terms of conception of Insee questionnaires and promising further research.