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# Indicators as policy tools towards a more social future of the EU

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## Résumé

Indicators can be powerful tools for setting visions of the future and translating them into policy objectives. They have recently gained popularity as policy tools in the European Union. Setting measurable targets for EU strategies and monitoring their implementation are seen as an effective way to achieve policy impact. However, the weight and significance of social indicators varies widely compared to that of the economic ones. They are treated as methodologically weaker and less politically influential, as there are no sanctions in case of breach. On the other hand, the 'social dimension' has gained prominence in the EU in connection with the detrimental effects of austerity and the EU's arguably failed response to the 2008 crisis (perceived by some as undermining the national social models). The European Pillar of Social Rights, accompanied by a social scoreboard of indicators (on equal opportunities, labour market conditions and social protection) is an example of a 'correction of course' attempting to rebalance the economic and social aspects. Linking its social scoreboard to the European Semester - the cycle of EU economic policy coordination - raised its profile and created incentives for EU countries to move in the direction of social convergence. The empirical research project, based on documentary analysis and interviews with EU officials, explores the background of how indicator sets are created, negotiated and implemented. Building on theories of the policy process and critical theories of EU integration, it analyses the interplay of factors affecting the take-up of indicators in policy. Preliminary findings reveal the key role of the stakeholders and organisational structures but also conflicting conceptions of the EU's socio-economic model among the actors. While there is still an imbalance between how social and economic indicators are perceived, the integration of the social scoreboard into the economic policy cycle may be interpreted as a possible shift towards the EU's more social future.

**Mots-Clés:** European Union, indicators, social dimension, European Pillar of Social Rights, European Semester

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