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Observatoire social européen rapport

Activity Report 2021



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European Social Observatory

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Introduction

So much has happened regarding EU policymaking since we published last year's European Social Observatory (OSE) activity report. The 2021 edition of our annual flagship book 'Social policy in the EU: state of play' (the '*Bilan social*', its short title in French) signals **important shifts** regarding fiscal policies, climate change, the digital agenda and health policy (1).

As regards *EU fiscal policies*, the Covid-19 pandemic broke several longstanding taboos in this area. The Stability and Growth Pact, one of the EU's holy cows, is still on hold. The Member States finally took the first step towards the creation of a fiscal stabilization instrument (called 'SURE'). And the vast EU recovery programme will be partially funded through the issuance of common EU debt. Even though it was hard-fought, the EU showed strong solidarity, which was unimaginable before the pandemic. Crucially, the EU is now pushing Member States towards public investments: imagine the contrast with the management of the 2008 financial crisis! A second important shift concerns *climate change*: many observers have argued that the European Green Deal has been strengthened, rather than weakened by Covid-19. And indeed, Member States have allocated almost 40% of the vast amounts now available through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to climate measures, even more than the target previously agreed. But we should not be naïve: the Green Deal legislative activity has been slowing down during 2021, while massive funding will be needed to cover the social costs of the 'just transition'. Lower-income regions especially will pay a high price.

Thirdly, measures to manage the *digital transition* have, again, been further spurred on by Covid-19. Major key legislative initiatives have been put on the EU agenda, aiming to regulate data, digital services and digital markets. A key question to ask is: *what are the social and labour market implications of this technological shift?* Digitalisation will undoubtedly improve productivity and work efficiency and will create new opportunities for both the economy and citizens. However, there are social risks involved that need to be seriously considered, including the labour rights and social security situation of platform workers, genuine participation of the social partners in managing the digital transition, and algorithmic management with a human face. Important changes are also taking place regarding *health policy*. The EU has been allowed a much stronger coordination and steering role in this policy area in the past year, once again because of Covid-19. However, the question is whether these changes are 'here to stay'. Indeed, the European Commission advocates a 'European Health Union'. But this would mean that powers on public health would need to be shared between the Member States and the EU. And we all know how difficult Treaty changes are.

1. The following paragraphs draw on Vanhercke B. and Spasova S. (eds.), *Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2021*, Brussels, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and European Social Observatory (OSE).

In this context of major policy changes, EU *social* policymaking – which had been severely disrupted in 2020 – clearly re-emerged in 2021. Social affairs players have been able to gradually claw back some of the space they lost in the European Semester in the past two years, while the Belgian and Spanish governments proposed (in May 2021) the development of a ‘social’ counterbalance to the macro-economic imbalance procedure. A key driver of EU social policymaking in the past year has been the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which was endorsed in May 2021 by the EU institutions, the European social partners and European civil society representatives. This uniquely broad support has revamped the EU’s social ambitions and led to the adoption of new EU-level headline targets for employment, skills and social inclusion, a European Child Guarantee and several initiatives around equality, including gender equality.

A second ambitious EU social policy initiative in 2021 was the Commission’s proposed *Directive on adequate minimum wages*: for the first time, the Commission proposed legislation not only to promote adequate levels of statutory minimum wages, but also to promote collective bargaining on wage setting, *and* to improve effective access to minimum wage protection. A third key initiative was the proposed *Directive on platform work*, which addresses key concerns that have spilled over from national debates regarding platform work. One of the major purposes of the proposed directive is to improve the working conditions of platform workers by ensuring that their employment status is correctly identified.

This context of renewed social policy ambitions is reflected in the OSE research activity during 2021, which addressed some of the issues at the very heart of the current policymaking agenda. All in all, the nine OSE researchers and four administrative staff – most of whom continued to work remotely throughout the year due to the enduring pandemic situation – were involved in no less than 15 research projects in 2021. As a result of this vibrant activity, the OSE maintained its position (since 2016) among the top 100 social policy think tanks worldwide in the ranking produced by the University of Pennsylvania.

We are happy to have kick-started exciting new research projects in the course of 2021. Thus, the OSE started its research activities as a partner in a Horizon 2020 European research project named ‘Working, Yet Poor’ (WorkYP): the OSE will draw up recommendations and policy proposals. Work also started on the new two-year European Commission-funded project on the ‘Impact of digitalisation on job quality and social dialogue in the public services’ (DIGIQU@LPUB). The OSE was furthermore contracted by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) to conduct research on how the Recovery and Resilience Facility has changed the power balance among key EU actors in the European Semester. We also conducted a preliminary assessment of the socio-ecological dimension of the EU recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, for the EUROsociAL+ cooperation programme between Latin America and the EU. Another new project for ETUI aimed to study the

conditions for and added value of setting up an EU Social Imbalances Procedure. We also brought out the 22nd edition of our annual '*Bilan social*', which was again produced in close collaboration with the ETUI. Smaller new projects in 2021 included a book chapter (for ETUI) describing the structures and policies of Bulgarian trade unions over the past two decades.

Other key projects continued from last year. Thus, we continued to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on social protection of non-standard workers and the self-employed in the EU in various projects, as well as examining support mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises in the context of the pandemic. We also carried on our regular scrutiny of EU-level developments with an impact on health care systems, for the Belgian national health insurance institute (NIHDI/INAMI/RIZIV): we tabled a highly visible action plan to address inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium and a quarterly electronic newsletter on recent EU developments with a potential impact on national health care systems. The International and European Digest for the '*Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale*' (RBSS) continued to reflect the main eco-social policy developments. During 2021, we wrapped up our contribution to the feasibility study for a European Child Guarantee for the European Commission, while the course on the social dimension of European integration at the College of Europe in Bruges carried on.

We also continued to cultivate our ties with European networks, notably through the European Commission-funded European Social Policy Network (ESPN). In 2021, the OSE contributed to a Thematic Report on 'Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis' and started work on a comparative report on 'National monitoring frameworks for public social spending'. Other work for ESPN included the preparation of a statistical database for the thematic report on the impact of Covid-19 on social protection schemes, as well as an ad hoc deliverable about access to social protection. OSE was also in charge of the quality control of the regular Flash Reports, Country Profiles, European Semester Reports and Economic Reform Programme Reports, produced by the 35 ESPN country teams.

The OSE research activity resulted in no less than 28 publications in 2021, while two additional OSE Working Papers were published.

Several in-house tools further boosted the dissemination of OSE expertise and knowledge to a large audience of researchers, think tanks, EU and national social partner representatives (both trade unions and employers' organisations), and to other social stakeholders such as European non-governmental organisations (NGOs):

- The OSE website: the total number of unique visitors ranged between between 744 and 1,889 per month in 2021. In total, some 14,452 unique visitors reached out to our website in 2021 (1,200/month on average).

- During this year, our publications were downloaded more than 2,700 times from the OSE website, but this is certainly a very significant underestimation of the actual number of downloads of our scientific production (see Section 6.3).
- More than 1,000 persons registered for (and 500 of them participated in) the three launch events (webinars) of the 'Bilan social 2020'.
- The OSE Flash News (+1,700 subscribers in 2021) and the European Health Care News (+1,200 subscribers) further enlarged our readership in Europe and beyond.
- The OSE Twitter account: we exceeded the cap of 2,000 followers in 2021.
- Nearly 1,000 persons followed us through the new OSE LinkedIn page.

This Activity Report is organised as follows: Section 1 provides a short presentation of the OSE's goals, resources, and organisational structure. Section 2 presents the OSE team in 2021 (short bios) and describes each staff member's main tasks and activities. Section 3 briefly describes each of the projects carried out by the OSE during the past year. Section 4 presents the events (co)organised by the OSE during the past year. Section 5 provides a taste of the team members' participation in various external activities. Key output data (i.e. the OSE's 'reach') are presented in Section 6, which also provides, for the first time, some examples of the **OSE's 'impact'** on policy initiatives and debates. Finally, Section 7 shows the full list of publications to which OSE researchers contributed in 2021.

New research in 2022 will include the scientific preparation of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2024, a new Horizon Europe project on welfare systems and the labour market, monitoring of domestic social partners' involvement in the Recovery and Resilience Fund and the 23rd edition of our annual volume on the state of play of social policy in the EU.

On behalf of the OSE team, I thank you for your interest in our work and wish you happy reading.

Bart Vanhercke,

Director

1. THE OSE IN A NUTSHELL: GOALS, RESOURCES AND ORGANISATION

The European Social Observatory (*Observatoire social européen*, OSE) is a Brussels-based not-for-profit research centre specialised in the social dimension of the European Union (EU). Its mission is to analyse the impact of European integration on social and employment policies both at EU level and within Member States. It does this by conducting comparative research and formulating policy proposals. With its forward-looking approach, it operates as a think tank, identifying issues as they emerge – from the impact of the internal market on healthcare systems and the social challenges associated with the EMU to the ‘greening’ of EU recovery and the social consequences of digitalisation.

Following a decision of the federal government in 2013, the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office has recognised the OSE as a ‘Scientific Institution’. As a result of its vibrant research activity, the OSE has been consistently ranked (by the University of Pennsylvania) since 2016 among the top 100 social policy think tanks worldwide ⁽²⁾: we are, for the sixth consecutive time, in the excellent company of the Brookings Institution (United States), the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE) (Poland) and the RAND Corporation (United States). Close to 4,000 individuals participated in the think tank rankings process ⁽³⁾.

Founded in 1984, the OSE draws on a broad network of Belgian and European public authorities, think tanks, the scientific community, social partner organisations (notably European and national trade unions) and civil society. Its team of researchers – swelled by research associates and interns from all over Europe and North America – is multidisciplinary and multilingual. The OSE has likewise acted as coordinator or partner in a variety of European projects and is actively involved in major networks of academic excellence funded under Horizon Europe and its predecessors. Since 1999 the OSE has provided substantive input for an annual volume entitled ‘Social policy in the European Union: state of play’, published in close cooperation with the ETUI. The OSE works closely with the European trade union movement – including in the context of the network of Trade Union related Research Institutes (TURI) – and civil society organisations (including the Social Platform).

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2. Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the University of Pennsylvania https://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/
 3. The think tanks in this category are considered ‘leading social policy institutions of the global community’ that provide ‘superior innovative research and strategic analyses’ and ‘excel in research, analysis and public engagement’, more particularly ‘with the aim of advancing debate and facilitating cooperation between relevant actors’.

1.1 GOALS

The OSE's main goals are to produce independent and state-of-the-art critical analysis of the social dimension of European integration. This implies, more concretely, that we:

- Analyse the impact of European integration on social and employment policies both at EU level and within the Member States, as well as neighbouring countries.
- Conduct research and formulate policy proposals.
- Provide an ongoing platform for discussion for a wide range of stakeholders, especially trade union organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Disseminate the results of the projects widely through our in-house resources.

1.2 RESOURCES

The OSE consists of a multidisciplinary and multilingual team of nine researchers and analysts, bolstered by a highly efficient administrative back office (four persons), as well as research associates and regular interns from all over Europe and North America.

Together they:

- Have a variety of expertise in cross-cutting areas such as gender and non-discrimination, the EU's socio-economic governance, the European Green Deal and European pandemic recovery.
- Assess the social dimension of European integration through the lenses of a variety of policymaking mechanisms, including the open method of coordination, EU legislation, EU funding and social dialogue.
- Can draw upon a broad-based network of public authorities (academic and other) researchers, think tanks, European and domestic social partner representatives and other social stakeholders.
- Have more than 30 years of expertise in organising both major (including in the framework of the Belgian Presidencies of the Council of the EU in 2001 and 2010) and smaller events (including national workshops in several EU Member States).

The OSE provides a unique forum for dialogue on the future of social Europe, engaging with a variety of national and EU stakeholders, decisionmakers and scholars. OSE research reaches a large audience through various communication tools which further boost the dissemination of OSE expertise and knowledge.

These in-house resources include:

- The revamped website (www.ose.be, in English and French): a valuable source of up-to-date information on OSE projects, publications, events and staff.

- The regular OSE Flash [News](#), providing a quick update on our key events and publications.
- The [Health Care Newsletter](#) (elaborated in English, French and Dutch, funded by the INAMI/RIZIV), providing regular summaries of current EU developments that may affect national health care systems.
- The OSE Paper [Series](#), encompassing three different publications – ‘Research’, ‘Briefing’ and ‘Opinion’ papers – written by the research team as well as by our research associates and external scholars.
- External events, during which leading academics, policymakers and stakeholders shed light on issues topping the EU agenda, in the presence of an audience of OSE researchers and their guests; more info: <https://www.ose.be/events>
- Our revamped [LinkedIn](#) page (+1,000 followers), institutional [Twitter](#) account (+2,000 followers), our researchers’ profiles on ResearchGate, short videos, podcasts and livestreaming of debates.

1.3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The day-to-day management of the OSE lies in the hands of Bart Vanhercke, who has been director since 2010: he takes care of the coordination of the team as well as the broad research strategy (including calls for tenders) and communication. He is supported in these tasks by Françoise Verri, the OSE’s administrative and financial manager: she manages the administrative team as well as organisational, budgetary and financial issues and supports the director with regard to the calls for tenders.

Altogether the OSE researchers and several research associates cover, amongst others, the following policy areas: employment and labour markets; healthcare; in-work poverty, poverty and social exclusion; job quality and working conditions; social dialogue; the socio-ecological transition; social protection, including pensions.

Over the years, the OSE has also gathered multidisciplinary expertise in such cross-cutting areas as gender and non-discrimination, the EU’s socio-economic governance, the European Green Deal and European pandemic recovery. The social dimension of European integration is assessed through the lenses of a variety of policymaking mechanisms, including the open method of coordination, EU legislation, EU funding and social dialogue.

A paragraph on each staff member can be found in Section 2, while more detailed profiles of all team members (scientific and administrative) can be found on the [Team](#) page of the website.

The elected Board of Directors ⁽⁴⁾ jointly oversees the activities of the OSE, while the General Assembly ⁽⁵⁾, which will be enlarged in 2022, brings together the broader group of stakeholders linked to the OSE. These include representatives from national and European trade union organisations, trade union-related research institutes, academic institutions and the International Labour Organisation.

The Scientific Advisory Board ⁽⁶⁾ provides independent scientific advice from renowned scholars, for example in the context of the peer review of the OSE Paper Series or the chapters of the annual 'Bilan Social'.

1.4 FUNDING

The diversity of the projects described in Section 3 below demonstrates that the OSE continues to be funded from a variety of sources, which include:

- Research contracts and subsidies from Belgian federal and regional authorities, including notably (a) the longstanding collaboration with the Belgian national health insurance institute (NIHDI/INAMI/RIZIV) and the Federal Public Service Social Security (SPF *Sécurité Sociale*); (b) wage subsidies, since the creation of the institute, from the Brussels regional employment office (ACTIRIS ⁷); and (c) the partial withholding tax exemption for research from the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (*La Politique scientifique fédérale*, BELSPO). Altogether these national resources made up 58.25 % of our funding (consolidated budget) in 2021.
- Contracts with European and international institutions: notably the European Commission. These resources provided 21.08 % of our 2021 funding.
- Subsidies, since the creation of the institute, from the Belgian Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV) and contracts with the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI); these amounts accounted for 19.72 % of our budget in 2021.
- Other resources, including various academic collaborations, training and consultancy represented less than 0.95 % of our 2021 budget.

4. See <https://www.ose.be/board-of-directors>

5. See <https://www.ose.be/general-assembly>

6. See <https://www.ose.be/scientific-committee>

7. Actiris provides specialised services to employers and jobseekers in the Brussels-Capital Region.

2. THE OSE STAFF: GOLDEN PARAGRAPHS

The OSE was made up of a variable team of 13 staff members during 2021: nine (full-time as well as part-time) researchers (including the director) and four full-time administrative staff. Several important staff changes occurred during this second Covid-year: we were happy to welcome Angelina Atanasova to the research team in September, while Boris Fronteddu and Stéphanie Coster accepted job opportunities elsewhere (leaving the OSE in June and September 2021, respectively). We ended our collaboration with Elodie Kibendo (secretariat). In view of the enduring pandemic situation, we were only able to accommodate two research interns, who however provided important additional human resources in terms of research assistance.

2.1 THE SCIENTIFIC TEAM

Angelina Atanasova - Researcher - Social protection, equality and anti-discrimination (gender and disability), rule of law and social policy

Angelina Atanasova has been a researcher at the European Social Observatory since September 2021. Her work covers the areas of gender equality and discrimination, disability rights, social inclusion as well as more specifically the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the social policy domain. More recently, she has expanded her work to cover the rule of law and its impact on social policy. In her work, she combines her in-depth knowledge of EU law with her methodological skills in conducting qualitative and quantitative analysis. She is studying for a PhD at the Public Law Department of KU Leuven, where her doctoral thesis is on the role of civic actors and lawyers in triggering the preliminary ruling procedure in EU law disputes regarding social policy. As a Fellow of the Reconstitution programme, in 2020-2021, Angelina further explored civic actors' fight for democracy through legal mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe. She is currently an associate member of the Faculty of Law at KU Leuven.

During 2021, Angelina has contributed to several projects at the OSE involving different aspects of social protection. In the context of the European Commission-funded European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Angelina contributed to the quality control of the country reports and co-authored the synthesis report 'National monitoring frameworks for public social spending', together with Slavina Spasova (lead author) and Pietro Regazzoni. Angelina contributed to the International Digest of the Belgian Review for Social Security (with Denis Bouget and Bart Vanhercke) and co-authored a chapter on the key events related to social policy at EU level in 2020 in the 'Bilan social 2021' (with Boris Fronteddu and Denis Bouget). Angelina further contributed to the research on the role of social partners in the national

Recovery and Resilience Plans⁽⁸⁾. She supported the DIGIQU@LPUB project by designing and coordinating (with Ramón Peña-Casas) the launch of a web survey on the impact of digitalisation on the work life of workers. Angelina contributed to developing the communications and publication strategy and the role of the OSE, in a Horizon Europe project led by the University of Amsterdam (with Bart Vanhercke and Françoise Verri).

Rita Baeten – Senior policy analyst – Healthcare and European integration

Rita Baeten, Master of Social Sciences, focuses her research activities (since 1999) on the impact of European integration on national healthcare systems and on their social character. Her research topics include inequalities in access to healthcare; EU economic governance and health systems; patient mobility; healthcare services in the internal market; and EU-level co-operation in the field of healthcare. Rita Baeten advises the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI/INAMI) on EU policy developments with a potential impact on healthcare in Belgium, and has coordinated the scientific preparation and follow-up of several international and ministerial conferences on EU integration and health systems. She has been leader for the OSE contribution to several projects financed by the European Commission under its framework programmes for research.

During 2021, Rita was the lead researcher of the project on EU level developments with an impact on health systems, funded by the NIHDI. This included the preparation of an action plan to reduce inequalities in financial access to health care in Belgium: drafting an inventory of existing policy proposals; the organisation of an online survey to assess the attitude of stakeholders and experts; drafting a report giving the survey results and a summary in French and Dutch; and active participation in the dissemination of a press release, together with INAMI/RIZIV.

Rita also participated, within the NIHDI/INAMI, in the activities to prepare the ‘Multi-annual budgetary trajectory 2022-2024’. She was an active member of the Scientific Committee, which guided and supported the process, and participated in the work of the Taskforce Healthcare Objectives (TF-GDOS), which evaluated and assessed the proposals for objectives and linked initiatives submitted by stakeholders. She was furthermore an expert member of the relaunched Scientific Committee, which, at the request of Minister Frank Vandenbroucke, drew up a report with a proposal for ‘a multi-annual budget for healthcare with healthcare objectives’.

She furthermore drafted four issues of the online quarterly ‘European Health Care News’ with electronic links to the most important decisions, opinions, judgments and other official

8. With Amy Verdun, Bart Vanhercke (lead authors), Slavina Spasova and Malcolm Thomson.

documents related to developments at European level that may have an impact on national healthcare systems. Together with Stéphanie Coster, Rita also contributed to the drafting of the section on healthcare in the second phase of the feasibility study for a Child Guarantee.

Dr Stéphanie Coster – Researcher – Unemployment, social exclusion, job quality

Stéphanie Coster was a part-time researcher at the OSE between November 2017 and August 2021. She has held a PhD in Economics and Management Sciences since March 2017. She is also a guest professor at the *Université Catholique de Louvain* (UCL), where she teaches courses in human resource management and labour studies. Her expertise is in the fields of industrial relations and human resource management. While working at the OSE, her research interests were mainly related to social exclusion, in-work poverty, precariousness, job quality, inequalities and unemployment.

During 2021, Stéphanie Coster contributed to the ESPN report on ‘access to social protection for young people’⁽⁹⁾. She co-authored a report for Formation Education Culture (FEC) on ‘Covid-19: EU mapping of economic and social protection measures for the SMEs and role of social dialogue’⁽¹⁰⁾. She also worked on social protection during the Covid-19 pandemic, notably in projects for ETUI and FEC which focused on non-standard workers and the self-employed in the EU⁽¹¹⁾. Stéphanie also participated in the initial OSE activities in the Horizon 2020 research project ‘WorkYP’ (Working, Yet Poor) (with Dalila Ghailani and Ramón Peña-Casas). She actively collaborated on the second phase of the feasibility study for a Child Guarantee coordinated by LISER and Applica (study of the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee Scheme including its financial foundation) as a thematic expert for the policy area ‘healthcare’, together with Rita Baeten.

Boris Fronteddu – Researcher – Eco-social policies, industrial policy, international trade

Boris Fronteddu was a researcher at the OSE between April 2019 and May 2021 (he is presently a researcher at the *Centre permanent pour la citoyenneté et la participation*, CPCP). He has a master’s degree in European journalism and a further master’s in European politics and communication from the *Institut des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales* (IHECS). Boris has mostly worked on eco-social policies, sustainable development and social policy in the EU while working at the OSE.

9. With Dalila Ghailani (lead author), Ramón Peña-Casas, Stéphanie Coster and Pietro Regazonni.

10. With Dalila Ghailani, Boris Fronteddu and Ramón Peña-Casas (lead author).

11. With Slavina Spasova (lead author), Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato, Boris Fronteddu and Bart Vanhercke.

During 2021, he co-authored a report for FEC on ‘Covid-19: EU mapping of economic and social protection measures for the SMEs and role of social dialogue’⁽¹²⁾ and contributed⁽¹³⁾ to reports for ETUI and FEC on social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed during the Covid-19 pandemic. He also co-authored the ESPN report on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’⁽¹⁴⁾.

Boris co-authored a chapter on the key events related to social policy at EU level in 2020 in the ‘*Bilan social 2021*’ (with Angelina Atanasova and Denis Bouget) and contributed to the dissemination of the of the ‘*Bilan social 2020*’, for which he was a co-editor (together with Bart Vanhercke and Slavina Spasova). Boris collaborated with Rita Baeten on the regular ‘European Health Care News’ and helped prepare the action plan to overcome inequalities in financial access to healthcare in Belgium. He was also a regular contributor to the European Digest for the *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale* (with Angelina Atanasova and Denis Bouget).

Dalila Ghailani – Senior researcher – European Law, employment and work, social protection, gender equality

Dalila Ghailani, with a master’s in law and advanced master’s in European business law, has 18 years of experience in monitoring a range of issues related to the social dimension of the EU, including employment policies, social protection, fundamental rights, gender issues, and the case law of the Court of Justice of the EU. She has conducted several studies for EU institutions, including the European Commission (PROWELFARE projects; assessment of the capacity of welfare systems and private enterprises to encourage older workers to stay in the labour market; assessment of the EU legal framework for the coordination of social security schemes and the portability of supplementary pension rights); the European Parliament (assessment of French and Belgian political parties’ policies and strategies for gender balance in the European Parliament; assessment of the impact of the crisis on fundamental rights in Belgium) and the European Economic and Social Committee (assessing the feasibility of introducing a European minimum income scheme).

During 2021, Dalila Ghailani co-authored the ESPN report on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’⁽¹⁵⁾ and was the lead author of the report on ‘access to social protection for young people’⁽¹⁶⁾. She co-authored a report for Formation Education

12. With Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster and Ramón Peña-Casas.

13. With Slavina Spasova, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato, Stéphanie Coster and Bart Vanhercke.

14. With Isabel Baptista (lead author), Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazonni.

15. With Isabel Baptista (lead author), Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Boris Fronteddu, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazonni.

16. With Ramón Peña-Casas, Stéphanie Coster and Pietro Regazonni.

Culture (FEC) on ‘Covid-19: EU mapping of economic and social protection measures for the SMEs and role of social dialogue’⁽¹⁷⁾. She also worked on social protection during the Covid-19 pandemic, notably in projects for ETUI and FEC which focused on non-standard workers and the self-employed in the EU⁽¹⁸⁾.

Dalila is also involved in the EU Horizon 2020 research project ‘WorkYP’ (Working, Yet Poor) (with Ramón Peña-Casas and Stéphanie Coster). In this context, she participated in the project meetings and reviewed several deliverables. In 2021, the European research project on ‘the impact of digitalisation on job quality and social dialogue in the public services’ (DIGIQU@LPUB) was launched. Dalila is co-manager of the project (with Bart Vanhercke) and leads the work package dedicated to information gathering. She is also involved in the work package dedicated to the cross-analysis of the impact of digitalisation on job quality of public services in eight EU countries.

Ramón Peña-Casas – Senior researcher – Employment and work, poverty, social inclusion, industrial relations

Ramón Peña-Casas, with a master’s in social sciences, joined the OSE team in 2000. His diverse areas of expertise in the field of socio-economic analysis cover, in particular, the diagnosis and comparative analysis of cross-cutting socio-economic issues affecting the various aspects of the European Union’s social dimension: poverty and social exclusion, social assistance and minimum income, digitalisation of work, quality of employment and work, in-work poverty, insecure employment, working conditions, active labour market policies and activation, flexicurity, active ageing as well as youth policy, restructuring and social dialogue. Ramón has coordinated many European and national projects on a range of subjects and is well-versed in the development, quality and political use of statistical indicators. Ramón Peña-Casas is a permanent member of several expert groups, including the ‘Belgian federal group on social indicators’ and the ‘Belgian Interdisciplinary Research Network on Poverty’ (GIREP). He is also a member of the Scientific Committee of the ‘*Observatoire Girondin de la Pauvreté et Précarité*’ (Bordeaux – France) and of the ‘Belgian Platform on social inclusion’.

During 2021, Ramón Peña-Casas co-authored two ESPN reports, namely the report on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’⁽¹⁹⁾ and the report on ‘Access to social protection for young people’⁽²⁰⁾. He also produces the statistical annex for

17. With Boris Fronteddu, Stéphanie Coster and Ramón Peña-Casas.

18. With Slavina Spasova (lead author), Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato, Boris Fronteddu and Bart Vanhercke.

19. With Isabel Baptista (lead author), Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazonni.

20. With Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster and Pietro Regazonni.

the 35 ESPN Country Profiles. As project leader, he co-authored the report for Formation Education Culture (FEC) on 'Covid-19: EU mapping of economic and social protection measures for the SMEs and role of social dialogue'⁽²¹⁾.

Ramón is also leading the OSE team in the EU Horizon 2020 research project 'WorkYP' (Working, Yet Poor) (with Dalila Ghailani and Stéphanie Coster). In this framework, he took part in the project meetings and reviewed several deliverables. In 2021, the European research project on the impact of digitalisation on job quality and social dialogue in the public services (DIGIQU@LPUB) was launched. Ramón is the scientific coordinator of the project and also leads the work package dedicated to the cross-analysis of the impact of digitalisation on job quality of public services in eight EU countries.

Dr Sebastiano Sabato – Senior researcher – European integration, EU social policies and governance, socio-ecological transition

Sebastiano Sabato holds a PhD in political science from the *Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane* (SUM) in Florence (2013) and a master's degree in economics and politics of European integration from the University of Bologna, Faculty of Political Sciences (Forlì). Since February 2014 he has been working as a researcher on European integration, and since February 2019 as a senior researcher at the OSE and is responsible for monitoring funding opportunities (with Bart Vanhercke). In 2013, he worked as a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Social and Political Science of the University of Milan and, in 2014-2015, he worked at the Department of Sociology at Antwerp University. Since January 2019, he has been a member of the Scientific Committee of the journal '*Politiche Sociali/Social Policies*', co-coordinating the journal's section on 'Welfare Europe'. His current research interests include EU socio-economic governance (including in the context of the EU's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic), EU and national social protection and social inclusion policies, social innovation, social dialogue, and the socio-ecological transition.

During 2021, Sebastiano Sabato's core research activity revolved around two main topics. First, the reinforcement of the social dimension of the EU through the setting-up of a Social Imbalances Procedure (SIP), notably as lead researcher in a report commissioned by the ETUI (with Bart Vanhercke). And second, EU policies for the socio-ecological transition, including in the framework of the recovery from the pandemic: Sebastiano led research activities for a study on the socio-ecological dimension of the EU recovery, funded by the EUROsociAL + Programme (study co-authored with Matteo Mandelli and Bart Vanhercke).

21. With Dalila Ghailani, Boris Fronteddu and Stéphanie Coster.

In the ESPN context, Sebastiano contributed to the report on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’⁽²²⁾. He also contributed⁽²³⁾ to two reports, respectively for ETUI (in English) and FEC (in French), on social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to this, he continued scanning potential funding opportunities for future OSE research projects. In 2021, Sebastiano published two articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals (Comparative European Politics and *Politiche Sociali/Social Policies*) and was invited as a speaker to a number of seminars, webinars, and (policy-oriented and academic) conferences (see Section 5 for details).

Dr Slavina Spasova – Senior researcher – Social protection, pension reforms, trade unions and social dialogue

Slavina Spasova, PhD in Political Science (*Université Libre de Bruxelles*, ULB), has been a researcher in the area of social protection at the OSE since January 2016, and a senior researcher since 2021. She is both OSE coordinator and overall pension leader in the European Social Policy Network (ESPN). Her research agenda focuses on various social policy issues linked to social protection, including pension reforms, work-life balance, healthcare, long-term care, sickness benefits etc. Slavina is also a research associate at the *Centre d'étude de la vie politique* (CEVIPOL), ULB. Since September 2020, she has also been working as an assessor (*experte invitée*) of Master theses at the *Département des Sciences sociales et des Sciences du travail* (ULB). In October 2021, Slavina joined the editorial board of the *Journal of European Social Security*. Her previous work has explored the transformation process of the Bulgarian trade unions since 1989 and their involvement in building social institutions through the mechanisms of international socialisation and ‘usages of Europe’.

During 2021, Slavina Spasova worked mostly on an analysis of the social protection measures taken by the Member States during Covid-19. She was the lead researcher⁽²⁴⁾ of two projects analysing social protection for non-standard workers and self-employed in the EU during the Covid-19 pandemic, conducted respectively for ETUI (in English) and *Formation Education Culture*, FEC (in French). She also coordinated the social protection part of the ESPN report on ‘social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19

22. With Isabel Baptista (lead author), Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani and Pietro Regazonni.

23. With Slavina Spasova, Dalila Ghailani and Bart Vanhercke.

24. With Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster, Sebastiano Sabato, Boris Fronteddu and Bart Vanhercke.

crisis'⁽²⁵⁾. She was also the co-editor, together with Bart Vanhercke (lead editor) of 'Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2021' (the 22nd edition of the '*Bilan social*').

Slavina presented her research and views at several events, including conferences on sickness benefits in the European Union (International Social Security Association – ISSA); the state of social security in Europe (*Journée d'étude Europe ACV-CSC*); social protection of the self-employed during Covid-19 (ESPANET). She also contributed to the dissemination of both the '*Bilan social 2020*' and '*Bilan social 2021*' edited volumes, and actively participated in the bi-annual ESPN network meetings and dissemination events. Slavina gave a lecture on the state of the European social dialogue 2014-2021 (*Sciences Po Lyon*) and was invited as a speaker to various events (see Section 5 for details).

Dr Bart Vanhercke – Director – European integration, social protection and social inclusion, governance

Bart Vanhercke, PhD in social science (Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, AISSR), has been director and senior researcher at the OSE since 2010. He is therefore in charge of the broad research strategy, the internal organisation of the team, managing the budget (with Françoise Verri), and implementing the OSE tendering and communication strategies. His current research focuses on the social dimension of the new European economic governance, including in the context of the EU's recovery. Bart Vanhercke was appointed, for the academic year 2013-2014, Associate Professor at the Institute for European Studies of Saint-Louis University (FUSL) and became Policy Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA Berlin) in November 2015. He was appointed associate member of the academic staff at the Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA, KULeuven) in June 2016 and was a visiting professor at the College of Europe during the academic year 2020-2021. He is the author of around 130 articles, chapters, edited volumes and reports.

During 2021, Bart Vanhercke was again the lead editor, together with Slavina Spasova, of the OSE's flagship book on 'Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2021' (EN-FR). Bart also contributed a chapter to the book (with Amy Verdun) and co-authored the book's conclusions, signed by the editors. Bart continued his work as social protection leader of the European Social Policy Network (ESPN), in close coordination with Slavina Spasova. Bart also contributed ⁽²⁶⁾ to two reports, respectively for ETUI (in English) and *Formation Education Culture, FEC* (in French), on social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

25. Report authored with Isabel Baptista (lead author), Eric Marlier, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazonni.

26. With Slavina Spasova (lead researcher), Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Stéphanie Coster.

Bart Vanhercke's core research activity in 2021 revolved around the side-lining of the social actors in the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which led to a variety of research outputs co-authored with Prof. Amy Verdun (University of Victoria). These include the theory-driven conclusions of a *Journal of Common Market Studies* (JCMS) special issue; two empirically-driven analyses, which explore the role of social actors in more detail (the aforementioned '*Bilan 2021*' book chapter, and an ETUI working paper ⁽²⁷⁾); and two concise opinion papers, which summarise the key findings (an AK EUROPA Policy Brief and an opinion piece in the 'Recovery and resilience' series of 'Social Europe'). The key findings of the research have also been discussed during a webinar organised by ETUI, the Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK EUROPA), the OSE and *ÖGB Europabüro*. As a visiting professor at the College of Europe, Bart also taught a course on 'The Social Dimension of European Integration' to an interdisciplinary group of students from across Europe.

During 2021, Bart Vanhercke also contributed to a paper (funded by the EUROsociAL Programme), led by Sebastiano Sabato, on the socio-ecological dimension of the EU recovery. He also worked on the research for ETUI (led by Sebastiano Sabato) concerning reinforcement of the social dimension of the EU through the setting-up of a Social Imbalances Procedure (SIP). He also supported Rita Baeten with the preparation of an action plan to address inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium (INAMI/RIZIV) and started working (with Dalila Ghailani and Ramón Peña-Casas) on the impact of digitalisation on job quality and social dialogue (DIGIQU@LPUB project). Together with Boris Fronteddu and Slavina Spasova, Bart steered the dissemination activities of both the '*Bilan 2020*' and '*Bilan 2021*'. This included, for the first time, an ETUI podcast ⁽²⁸⁾. He actively contributed to the writing and coordination of several competitive tenders.

Bart also presented his research and views at several online events organised by ETUI, the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), AK EUROPA, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, the DCU Brexit Institute, *UCLouvain*, the 'Leuven-Europa Kring', *ÖGB Europabüro* and others (see Section 5 for more details). Bart also managed, together with Slavina Spasova, the OSE Paper Series (two working papers were published in 2021) and contributed to the *International Digest* of the Belgian Review for Social Security (with Angelina Atanasova, Denis Bouget and Boris Fronteddu). He co-authored (with Slavina Spasova) a book chapter on 'old age care', in an edited volume (by Georg Fischer and Robert Strauss) published by Oxford University Press.

27. With Amy Verdun, Angelina Atanasova, Slavina Spasova and Malcolm Thomson.

28. ETUI podcast: <https://anchor.fm/etui/episodes/S2-Ep-6---Bart-Vanhercke-EU-Social-policy---state-of-play-etaibu>

2.2 THE OSE BACK OFFICE: THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Elodie Kibendo – Secretary

Elodie Kibendo worked as a secretary at the European Social Observatory between November 2017 and November 2021. Her tasks consisted in answering telephone calls, drafting reports of administrative meetings, sending and receiving institutional emails (internal and external communication). She also helped to organise events and harmonised bibliographical references in the OSE Paper Series and the annual '*Bilan social*' books. She was responsible for the distribution of the paper copies of the book and for the updating of the OSE database. Elodie also assisted with interview transcriptions.

Benoît Malice – Web Assistant

Benoît Malice provides logistics support for conferences (preparing files of documents, reception – publication displays). He performs various secretarial tasks: document-binding, photocopies, transcribing texts, etc. He handles the layout of the OSE Paper Series. He performs several support tasks for the website: input to the various sections of the site, HTML layout of the newsletter 'European Health Care News' (French, Dutch and English); corrections and addition of various sections (French and English); checking all web pages, uploading new content, updating bibliographical references in the publications pages as well as the posting of registration forms. During 2021, he was fully involved, together with Renaud Smoes, in the preparation of the new OSE website.

Renaud Smoes – Webmaster

Renaud Smoes manages the IT equipment and security, manages and updates the OSE site, project webpages and contact database. During 2021, Renaud managed several changes of infrastructure and security solutions for the OSE website with the support of Lab360, partly due to a hosting provider incident (massive fire in the OVHcloud data center in Strasbourg in March 2021). He analyses and implements online working solutions such as Basecamp or Office 365 with the support of external collaborators, which have proved to be essential tools for managing the constant flow of documents in collaborative research projects such as ESPN. He manages the OSE Flash News and the 'European Health Care News' newsletter (HTML layout, sending out the letter, mailing list) for the NIHDI contract. He has also managed the websites for one-off projects. He is in charge of the IT aspects of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). His other tasks include events organisation (invitations, management of the subscriptions, welcoming, technical support) and generating graphic material for researchers, slides and visual aids for OSE events.

Françoise Verri – Financial and administrative manager

Françoise Verri, with the OSE Director, manages calls for tender (e.g. drafting budgets, planning tables, checking of the OSE offers and online registration), manages the finances of the institution, produces financial reports for all projects (both European and national), draws up the budgets and is responsible for the administrative management of the OSE (staff, relations with outside bodies, supplies, etc.). She prepares the accounts, makes payments, is responsible for invoicing and VAT as well as for the organisation and practical coordination of books, papers, programmes and invitations, the final revision of notes and reports and managing translations for the various publications. Finally, she drafts the minutes of the key meetings: the four-monthly Board of Directors and annual General Assembly.

2.3 INTERNSHIPS

The OSE has concluded internship agreements with the University of Milan as well as with Brigham Young University (Utah, United States). The University of Amsterdam and the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) have been sending students on a regular basis, while we regularly receive direct applications from individuals. As a result, bachelor and master students in political science, sociology, economics and law make ongoing contributions to the OSE research activities. For most OSE interns their stay at the OSE is a mandatory part of their curriculum, for which they receive a bursary from the sending institution.

The OSE provides these students with opportunities to network with top researchers and politicians in various fields, as well as (in case of an outstanding internship) giving them letters of recommendation that they can take to future job interviews. For many interns at the OSE, it is the first time that they get to experience work in research, which often proves to be invaluable in their future career decisions and opportunities. Interns are involved at different levels in a variety of research projects covering all employment and social fields. They help by drafting minutes of events, qualitative research, editing work, interview transcriptions, translation and drafting the OSE activity reports. Interns' written pieces regularly appear in OSE publications, and are acknowledged as such: in several cases, interns have been recognised as co-authors.

In 2021, due to the Covid-19 situation, we were only able to accommodate two research interns: Maristella Cacciapaglia from the University Aldo Moro in Bari and Pietro Regazzoni from the University of Milan. Maristella Cacciapaglia assisted Sebastiano Sabato with background research on just transition (including on the implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism and on the establishment of the Social Climate Fund), and provided overall research assistance (reviewing publications, suggesting data sources, bibliographic research, completing references etc.). Pietro Regazzoni contributed to – and ultimately co-

authored – the ESPN reports on ‘access to social protection for young people’ and on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’: for both reports, as well as for an ESPN ad hoc deliverable, he provided invaluable research assistance.

3. NUTS AND BOLTS: RESEARCH PROJECTS CARRIED OUT IN 2021

This section provides a snapshot overview of the 15 projects managed by the OSE team in 2021 (almost equalling the 16 research projects in 2020). More details on each of them can be found on the project page of the OSE website (in EN and FR).

A - THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK 2 (2018-2021)

The ‘ESPN1’ consortium successfully secured the continuation of this Commission-funded network. The ‘ESPN2’ currently covers 35 countries: the 28 EU countries as well as seven candidate and potential candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. It also provides ad hoc social policy analysis for an additional set of countries inside and outside Europe. Finally, the ESPN acts as the secretariat to MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection). At the heart of ESPN2 are still 35 country teams of independent social policy experts who are supported and coordinated by a central team of international experts.

In 2021, the OSE has managed regular thematic reports, including the drafting of synthesis reports on ‘Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis’ and ‘Access to social protection for young people’. The OSE was in charge of quality control of the regular Flash Reports (with Eric Marlier) and of the Country Profiles, European Semester Reports and the Economic Reform Programme Reports, produced by the 35 country teams. OSE researchers involved in this project in 2021: Slavina Spasova (ESPN coordinator), Angelina Atanasova, Stéphanie Coster, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Ramón Peña-Casas, Sebastiano Sabato and Bart Vanhercke (ESPN social protection leader).

B - FOLLOW UP OF EU LEVEL DEVELOPMENTS WITH AN IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS: INAMI (2020-2021)

The OSE continues to provide the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI/INAMI) and the Belgian health authorities with expertise and analysis on EU policies with a potential impact on national healthcare systems. This project is the continuation of a longstanding collaboration between the OSE and the NIHDI in this field.

For 2021 the project included: a) expert advice on EU policies with a potential impact on healthcare systems in general and the Belgian health care system in particular; b) the

publication of a quarterly electronic newsletter on recent EU developments with a potential impact on national healthcare systems; c) the preparation of an action plan to address inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium, in a European perspective. OSE researchers involved in this project in 2021: Rita Baeten (project leader), Boris Fronteddu, Renaud Smoes and Bart Vanhercke.

C - WORKING, YET POOR – WorkYP (2020-2023)

The OSE started its activities as a partner in a Horizon 2020 European research project named ‘Working, Yet Poor’ (WorkYP). The project (2020-2023) is being coordinated by the University of Luxembourg and involves eight European universities as well as three social rights institutions, including the OSE and the European Anti-poverty network (EAPN). The consortium explores the drivers of the recurrent phenomenon of in-work poverty (IWP) in the EU in the light of social rights of EU workers and citizens, notably those proclaimed in the EPSR. The project will make recommendations to the EU and Member States to strengthen the objectives of the EPSR.

WorkYP covers seven countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Sweden and the Netherlands. In each country, four clusters of particularly Vulnerable and Underrepresented Persons (VUP) have been identified. WorkYP uses a multifaceted and multidisciplinary methodology that combines legal and socio-economic analysis. In addition to being involved in various analytical work packages (WPs), the OSE is leader of a WP aiming to draw up recommendations and policy proposals to tackle IWP by improving the social rights of the VUP. OSE researchers involved: Ramón Peña-Casas (project leader), Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster and Bart Vanhercke.

D - DIGITALISATION AND JOB QUALITY (2021-2023)

The OSE successfully secured the two-year (2021-2023) European research project on the ‘Impact of digitalization on job quality and social dialogue in the public services’ (DIGIQU@LPUB). The project is funded through the European Commission budget line ‘Improving expertise in the field of industrial relations’ (VP/2020/004). In recent years, public service workers are increasingly using connected tools and methods that shape the way their job tasks are implemented, scheduled, controlled, and ultimately benefit public service users. The research project, led by the OSE, aims at improving understanding of the impact of digitalization on job quality in the public services, by highlighting the perceptions that workers themselves have of the changes generated by digitalization in the performance of their daily tasks. It also aims at raising awareness among trade unions and decisionmakers of the consequences of the digital transition of work for the public services.

At the core of the project are eight case studies in as many countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain. The focus is on three public service sectors: electricity suppliers, public administrations (national/regional/local governments) and hospitals (healthcare services). The DIGIQU@LPUB partnership brings together twelve institutions across the EU: the European Social Observatory (BE), European Public Services Union (EU); *Fondazione Giuseppe di Vittorio* (IT); *Scuola Universitaria superior Pisa* (IT); Aalborg University (DK); *Secafi – Groupe Alpha* (FR); *Institut Arbeit und Technik* (DE); Institute of Public Affairs (PL); *IRES Emilia Romagna* (IT); *Fundación 1^o de Mayo* (ES); ÉTOSZ (HU); University of Turku (FI). OSE researchers involved: Dalila Ghailani (co-manager), Ramón Peña-Casas (scientific coordinator), Angelina Atanasova and Bart Vanhercke (co-manager).

E - NON-STANDARD WORKERS AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED IN THE EU: SOCIAL PROTECTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020-2022)

The OSE continued its research for the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), examining the social protection measures taken in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic related to sickness, unemployment and leave benefits in the EU27. The deliverables of the project consist in an overall mapping report of the national measures, eight in-depth national case studies and a final analytical report. The mapping report described the key social protection measures taken during the pandemic from the perspective of fragmentation of labour market statuses, notably by focusing on non-standard workers and the self-employed as well as taking into account the gender dimension of these social protection measures. The analysis focused on the 27 EU Member States, covering the period of the first wave of the pandemic: from the beginning of the lockdown measures (for most countries at the beginning of March 2020) until 31 December 2020.

This study was among the first to focus exclusively on the social protection measures taken by Member States to support non-standard workers and the self-employed in the context of the pandemic. It contributed to the monitoring and evaluation of the 2019 Council Recommendation on access to social protection. OSE researchers involved: Slavina Spasova (project leader), Stéphanie Coster, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Bart Vanhercke.

F - COVID-19: MAPPING OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR SMES (2020-2021)

The OSE finalised research for *Formation Education Culture* (FEC), an association for life-long learning and socio-cultural promotion linked to the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (*Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens* - CSC). The first part of the research (published as a *Cahier de la FEC*) maps the social protection measures taken in the 27 EU

Member States in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on some categories of non-standard workers and the self-employed. The second part (published as an OSE Briefing Paper) carried out a systematic inventory of the policy measures taken in response to the pandemic to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and their employees. The role played by the social partners and social dialogue is also investigated in this context. OSE researchers involved in this project: Ramón Peña-Casas (leader part two), Slavina Spasova (leader part one), Stéphanie Coster, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Bart Vanhercke.

G - THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY AND THE SEMESTER: ACTORS, STRUCTURES AND INNOVATION (2021)

The OSE was contracted by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and the Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK Europa) to conduct research which resulted in a report entitled 'From the European Semester to the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Some social actors are (not) resurfacing', as well as a Policy Brief on the same topic. The research examined how and why the Semester became part of the governance of the RRF. It also asked to what extent this new set-up has changed the power balance among key EU actors (for example, financial and economic actors versus institutional social affairs actors).

Drawing on extensive document analysis and 32 semi-structured elite interviews, the research project concludes that initially, due to the crisis (and desire for fast action), there was a serious risk that EU institutional social actors were losing the prominence they had previously earned. They gradually reclaimed their position as the immediacy of the crisis subsided and a longer-term focus emerged. EU civil servants also engaged with social partners on both sides of industry, even though it is questionable whether this consultation has been meaningful. Researchers involved in this project: Bart Vanhercke (lead researcher), Amy Verdun (University of Victoria, Canada), Angelina Atanasova, Sebastiano Sabato, Slavina Spasova and Malcolm Thomson (University of Victoria).

H - THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF EU RECOVERY: A MAPPING EXERCISE (2021-2022)

The European Commission-funded programme for cooperation between the EU and Latin America on social and employment policies 'EUROsociAL+' asked the OSE to conduct a study on the socio-ecological dimension of the EU recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. The objective of this research is twofold. First, to identify and discuss relevant initiatives taken at the EU level aimed at linking and making environmental and social objectives compatible in the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. These include the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the most relevant EU policy documents/strategies on which the latter is based (including the European Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights). Second, to provide a

preliminary assessment of the socio-ecological dimension of the EU recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, including its potential and limitations.

The OSE was equally asked by EUROsociAL+ to assist with the scientific preparation of a seminar on ‘Green transition, just transition. Euro-Latin American dialogue on the social challenges to ensure a just green transition’. The seminar took place on 20 May 2022 in a hybrid form (online and at the Alberto Hurtado University of Santiago de Chile). Speakers included European and Latin-American academics, policymakers and civil society representatives. On that occasion, Sebastiano Sabato presented (together with Matteo Mandelli) the key findings of the study ‘The Socio-Ecological Dimension of the EU Recovery. From the European Green Deal to the Recovery and Resilience Facility’. Researchers involved in this project were Sebastiano Sabato (lead researcher) and Bart Vanhercke.

I – SOCIAL IMBALANCES PROCEDURE

In view of the formidable challenges ahead related to recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and to the green and digital transitions, the ETUI asked the OSE, following a competitive tender, to reflect on how the EU social governance toolbox could be further strengthened. The first aim of the project is to assess and critically evaluate existing social benchmarking or ‘scoreboards’ (or proposals for possible ‘scoreboards’) aimed at identifying or correcting social imbalances within the EU, including by means of a literature review. Second, the OSE will explore the possibility of setting up an EU instrument aimed at identifying and correcting social imbalances in the Member States, thus helping to address the structural asymmetry between the economic and the social dimension of the European integration process.

Thirdly, the OSE will delineate the main features and the functioning of such an instrument. Finally, the OSE team will discuss both the added value and possible limitations and shortcomings of a possible Social Imbalances Procedure (from both a technical and political point of view). The preliminary results will be debated during an experts’ workshop, in order to discuss and test the findings before finalizing them. The project will culminate, during 2022, in a report for ETUI.

J - SOCIAL POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: STATE OF PLAY 2021

The OSE was contracted by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) to conduct research which resulted in the 22nd edition of the ‘*Bilan social*’, edited by Bart Vanhercke and Slavina Spasova. Contributors to the book include Cinzia Alcidi, Angelina Atanasova, Denis Bouget, Hans Bruyninckx, Francesco Corti, Michael Dauderstädt, Thibaud Deruelle, Boris Fronteddu, Gülcin Karadeniz, Jock Martin, Aida Ponce Del Castillo and Amy Verdun.

The first chapters of this year's *Bilan social* analyse the impact of the pandemic on various socio-economic groups and economic sectors, asking: who are the winners and losers from the pandemic? The EU's arsenal has been considerably enhanced by economic support measures unprecedented in size and breaking with longstanding EU taboos. Member States are paving the way for a 'stronger European Health Union'. We also discuss the main initiatives of the European Green Deal, and how its implementation roadmap can achieve the EU's climate targets. How can digitalisation be moulded to benefit the climate and society – and not Big Tech? Will the power balance between economic and social forces in the EU recovery finally be tilted in favour of the latter? In the second half of the book, we analyse new initiatives bringing answers to these questions and providing further building blocks for the EU's (post-Covid) social and climate agenda.

K - STUDY ON THE ECONOMIC IMPLEMENTING FRAMEWORK OF A POSSIBLE EU CHILD GUARANTEE SCHEME (2020-2021)

The OSE participated in the second phase of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG 2), as thematic expert for the policy area 'healthcare'. The study, coordinated by Anne-Catherine Guio, Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, LISER), provides a detailed economic analysis of the design, governance, costs, benefits and implementation options of this important EU initiative. It focuses on access to free healthcare, education, childcare as well as decent housing and adequate nutrition. The feasibility study demonstrates that the costs associated with a Child Guarantee scheme in the 27 EU Member States are relatively low in light of potentially high benefits. OSE researchers involved in this project: Stéphanie Coster (lead researcher) and Rita Baeten.

L - INTERNATIONAL DIGEST – BELGIAN REVIEW FOR SOCIAL SECURITY (2019-2021)

The OSE continued its collaboration with the Belgian Federal Public Service Social Security, writing the 'European and International Digest' for the quarterly *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale* (RBSS/BTSZ). The Digest provides a regular overview of international developments (EU, OECD, ILO etc.) that have a direct or indirect impact on social protection and social inclusion policies and debates. Since 2019, this Digest includes information on environmental decisions taken by these institutions with a direct impact on public health and welfare. The goal is to emphasise the increasingly close link between the environment (water quality, air quality, soil quality, etc.) and our daily lives. This points to the need to include these elements in a new, broader understanding of the concept of 'social protection'. Researchers involved in this project: Angelina Atanasova (lead researcher), Boris Fronteddu, Denis Bouget and Bart Vanhercke.

M - IS THE 'EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL' A REALITY OR AN ELUSIVE CONCEPT? (2020-2021)

Bart Vanhercke continued his activities as visiting professor at the College of Europe, a postgraduate institute of European studies. More particularly, he taught a course on 'the Social dimension of European integration' to an interdisciplinary group of students from across Europe. The course addressed the interaction between EU economic and social policies as well as the range of EU social policy instruments. The course adopts a multidisciplinary approach to European social policies, with a view to highlighting the interactions between different levels of governance (Europeanisation) as well as the role of actors, ideas and institutions. Finally, the course highlights links between the day-to-day EU initiatives and the main theoretical frameworks that explain the historical development of the EU's social dimension, which has partly taken place 'through the back door' of the internal market and economic governance. It ultimately asked this question: *is the 'European social model' a reality or an elusive concept?*

N - THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK 2: AD HOC DELIVERABLES (2021)

In addition to our regular work for the European Social Policy Network (ESPN2), the European Commission asked the OSE to produce several ad hoc deliverables on topical social protection and social inclusion issues. These included preparation of the statistical database for the thematic report on the impact of Covid-19 on social protection schemes (Ramón Peña-Casas) and an ad hoc deliverable about access to social protection (Slavina Spasova and Pietro Regazzoni).

O - TRADE UNIONS IN EUROPE

The OSE is a partner in this project led by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) which assesses the state of trade unionism in the European Union and will culminate in an edited volume edited by Jeremy Waddington, Thorsten Müller and Kurt Vandaele (to be published in 2022). Slavina Spasova contributed a chapter which describes the state of play of Bulgarian trade unionism and its development since the 2000s in all areas of trade union activity: social dialogue and collective bargaining, relations with the government, employers and civil society. The chapter looks into the strong pro-European attitudes and activities of the trade unions and how these helped them to legitimise their place in the Bulgarian political and economic structures.

4. THE PLACES TO BE: OSE EVENTS IN SHORT

This section describes the four events that have been (co-)organised by the OSE throughout 2021: due to the Covid-19 situation, these events were mostly held online (webinars), as a result of which they attracted a much wider audience than has ever been the case. More details can be found on the OSE website. An overview of the participation of OSE researchers in events organised by other institutions is provided in Section 5 ('Up close and Personal').

To mark the publication of 'Social Developments in the European Union 2020', the OSE and the ETUI organised three webinars to discuss the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU's social policy perspectives in different policy areas and the overall EU policy strategy. These online events attracted a record number of participants to the presentation of our flagship book: more than 1,000 persons registered, and 500 of them effectively took part in one or more of these three events. The video recordings of these webinars, which brought together researchers, policymakers and actors from trade unions and civil society, are available online.

12/01/2021 – The EU facing the pandemic: from crisis to collective action – OSE/ETUI joint *Bilan 2020* event

Keynote speakers: Karen Anderson, Anniek De Ruijter, Boris Fronteddu, Martin Myant, Philippe Pochet, Oliver Röpke, Slavina Spasova, Bart Vanhercke and Luca Visentini.

22/01/2021 – Gender equality and in-work poverty: which role for the European Union? – OSE, ETUI and AK EUROPA joint *Bilan 2020* event

Keynote speakers: Nicola Countouris, Petra Völkerer, Bart Vanhercke (OSE), Jill Rubery, Isabel Tavora, Ramón Peña-Casas, Maria Jepsen, Esther Lynch, Mary Collins, Ane Aranguiz, Slavina Spasova and Boris Fronteddu.

28/01/2021 – Delivering the Green Deal: sustainable development in a reformed European Semester – OSE/ETUI joint '*Bilan 2020*' event

Keynote speakers: Bart Vanhercke, Éloi Laurent, Sebastiano Sabato, Slavina Spasova, Béla Galgóczi, Linda McAvan, Sarah Nelen, Ludovic Voet, Ester Asin and Boris Fronteddu.

07/09/2021 – The Recovery and Resilience Facility: have social actors been sidelined?
– Webinar organised by ETUI, the Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK EUROPA), the OSE and ÖGB Europabüro

How did the European Semester end up as the main institutional vehicle of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)? To what extent did this new set-up change the power balance among key actors (e.g., financial and economic actors versus social affairs actors)? And, crucially, have social actors been sidelined from the governance of the RRF? This webinar discussed the key findings of new research carried out by the OSE and the University of Victoria on behalf of AK EUROPA and the ETUI.

Keynote speakers: Bart Vanhercke, Amy Verdun, Norbert Templ, Sotiria Theodoropoulou, Benoît Lallemand and Nicola Contouris.

5. UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL: TEAM MEMBER ACTIVITIES

OSE researchers participated in some 35 events, as speakers, panellists or moderators, during 2021.

12/01/2021 The EU facing the pandemic: from crisis to collective action

OSE/ETUI joint event (webinar) at the first launch event of the '*Bilan social 2020*'. OSE speakers: Bart Vanhercke, Slavina Spasova and Boris Fronteddu.

19/01/2021 Social Impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis

Bart Vanhercke shared his views on 'Structural shifts in the post-pandemic world' during a panel discussion with Maria Jepsen, Georg Fischer and Michael Landesmann during an online event organised by the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies – wiiw.

22/01/2021 Gender equality and in-work poverty: which role for the EU?

Bart Vanhercke, Ramón Peña-Casas, Slavina Spasova and Boris Fronteddu shared their views during this OSE, ETUI and AK EUROPA joint event (webinar) for the launch of the '*Bilan social 2020*'.

28/01/2021 Delivering the Green Deal: sustainable development in a reformed European Semester

Bart Vanhercke, Sebastiano Sabato, Slavina Spasova and Boris Fronteddu acted as speakers during this third OSE/ETUI joint event (webinar) for the launch of the '*Bilan social 2020*'.

05/02/2021 Should our healthcare be reorganised?

In a 50-minutes podcast of the *Zeitgeist* programme for the VRT broadcaster *Klara*, OSE senior policy analyst Rita Baeten, together with Ri De Ridder (Cabinet of Minister Frank Vandenbroucke), was interviewed by Werner Trio, in a series on 'A healthy mind in a healthy body'. Available via: <https://klara.be/zeitgeist-een-gezonde-geest-gezonder-body-2>.

11/02/2021 The preparatory Action for a Child Guarantee. Guaranteeing access to free healthcare

Rita Baeten spoke on the importance of free regular routine health examinations/screening programmes and follow-up treatment at the closing online conference of the second phase of the preparatory action for a Child Guarantee, organised by the European Commission and the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER).

22/02/2021 Open Strategic Autonomy

Bart Vanhercke shared his views on the social, economic and environmental aspects of the EU's 'Open Strategic Autonomy' during this workshop organised by the Foresight, Modelling, Behavioural Insights Unit of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC).

15/03/2021 Social policy in the EU: state of play – podcast

Bart Vanhercke summarised, on behalf of the book editors, the key message of the '*Bilan social 2020*' edited volume for a podcast produced by the ETUI, pointing among others to the fuzzy EU commitment to gender issues, the EU response to rising in-work poverty and the setting of a new social-ecological contract.

19/03/2021 European Green Deal: setting the course

Sebastiano Sabato and Boris Fronteddu presented and debated their views on 'The European Green Deal and just transition' during this webinar on 'How socially just is the European Green Deal?', as part of a conference organised by the delegation of the German Greens in the European Parliament.

12/04/2021 An economy that works for the people: beyond Brexit and Covid-19

Bart Vanhercke presented his views on the sidelining of social actors in the European Semester in a panel with Michael Breen, Ramon Marimon and Vivien A. Schmidt on 'The new EU economic policy after Covid-19 and Next Generation EU'. Online event organised by the DCU Brexit Institute (Prof. Federico Fabbrini).

22/04/2021 Health inequalities: focus on the weak spots in our system

Rita Baeten was interviewed for Health Forum, the newsletter of the independent health insurance funds (MLOZ) on the theme 'Health inequalities: focus on the weak spots in our system'.

27/04/2021 European Social Policy Network

Slavina Spasova presented the results of the ESPN report on Covid-19 impact on social protection and social inclusion policies (together with Isabel Baptista) during the ESPN bi-annual expert meeting.

26/05/2021 General Assembly of the European Social Insurance Platform

Slavina Spasova took part in an exchange of views with the members of the ESIP General Assembly on the policy measures for non-standard workers and the self-employed during Covid-19.

04/05/2021 Roadmap to quality employment through a just transition and a fair recovery

Sebastiano Sabato presented his views on ‘A roadmap to just transition: giving teeth to the European Pillar of Social Rights’ during this workshop organised by SOLIDAR and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) in view of the Porto Social Summit.

06/05/2021 Social policy in the EU 2020

Bart Vanhercke presented the ‘*Bilan social 2020*’ edited volume for the ‘Droit social européen’ course at the *UCLouvain* (Prof. Pascale Vieille and Filip Dorssemont) for Master students.

3-4/06/2021 Politicologenetmaal

Amy Verdun and Bart Vanhercke shared their views on ‘The Covid-19 Crisis and the future of socio-economic governance in the EU’ during the annual Political Science Workshops of the Low Countries.

9/06/2021 Journée d'étude Europe ACV-CSC

Slavina Spasova gave a keynote speech on ‘*La protection sociale dans l'Union européenne: enjeux, lacunes et perspectives futures*’ and participated in the ensuing debate with trade union members.

15/06/2021 Hoe sociaal is Europa?

Bart Vanhercke presented his views on the role of social stakeholders in European integration during this online panel debate with Jonathan Stabenow (DG EMPL), Kristine Van Herck (DG EMPL), Rudi Delarue (*Nationale Arbeidsraad*) and Patrick Develtere (KU Leuven) organised by the ‘Leuven-Europa Kring’ (LEUK).

21/06/2021 27th International Conference of Europeanists

Sebastiano Sabato presented a paper on ‘EU economic governance and the socio-ecological transition. Towards a more sustainable European Semester?’ (written together with Matteo Mandelli and Matteo Jessoula) at this virtual conference organised by the Council of European Studies (the session on ‘Rethinking EU social policy’).

29/06/2021 Pension Adequacy report 2021

Slavina Spasova acted as a chair and moderator of two breakout sessions: ‘Pension financing in the long-term perspective: supporting fairness’ and ‘Income inequality in old age and

gender gap: addressing the challenges ahead’, during the two-day launch conference of the European Commission’s 2021 Pension Adequacy Report (PAR).

30/06/2021 Eliminating inequalities in financial access to health care

Rita Baeten presented ‘Eliminating inequalities in financial access to health care, analysis of a survey of experts and stakeholders’ during an online meeting of the taskforce Health Care Objectives (GDOS) related to the multi-annual draft budget of the RIZIV/INAMI.

09/07/2021 Social cohesion in the green transition

Sebastiano Sabato was invited to give a speech on ‘Towards a just transition? From the European Green Deal to the Recovery and Resilience Facility’ during this workshop organised as part of the research project ‘Ecoesione’ (*coesione sociale nella transizione ecologica*) held in Pisa (Italy).

31/08/2021 European Network for Social Policy Analysis (ESPANET) 2021

Slavina Spasova presented a paper ‘The self-employed and non-standard workers in job retention schemes during the Covid-19 pandemic: were they really protected?’ (with Pietro Regazzoni) during the ESPANET online conference (session on ‘self-employment: past, present and future under post-Covid pandemic’).

02/09/2021 European Network for Social Policy Analysis (ESPANET) 2021

Sebastiano Sabato presented a paper on ‘Balancing economic governance and the socio-ecological transition. The case of the 2020 European Semester’ (written with Matteo Mandelli and Matteo Jessoula) at the ESPANET online conference (session on ‘Overlapping or merging policy agendas? The emergence of EU eco-social policies’).

07/09/2021 The Recovery and Resilience Facility: have social actors been sidelined?

Bart Vanhercke presented his joint work with Amy Verdun (University of Victoria) during this event jointly organised by ETUI, AK EUROPA, OSE and *ÖGB Europabüro*.

09/09/2021 ESPAnet Italy Conference

Sebastiano Sabato was invited to give a speech on ‘The socio-ecological dimension of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility’ during the roundtable on ‘Understanding eco-social policies: green transition, sustainable welfare and the European Green Deal’.

23/09/2021 EISS Conference 2021 “Tackling new forms of work in social security”

Slavina Spasova gave a speech on ‘Social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed in the EU. Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic’ during this conference organised by the European Institute of Social Security and the University of Zagreb.

30/09/2021 Sciences Po Lyon (Master 2 AlterEurope)

Slavina Spasova gave a lecture on '*Le dialogue social européen: entre relance et contraintes politiques et institutionnelles (2014-2021)*'.

04/10/2021 Eliminating inequalities in financial access to health care

Rita Baeten presented 'Eliminating inequalities in financial access to healthcare, an analysis of a survey of experts and stakeholders' during an online meeting of the insurance committee of the RIZIV/INAMI.

11/10/2021 European Social Policy Network Meeting (ESPN)

Slavina Spasova presented the Guidelines of the ESPN thematic report on monitoring social protection budgets.

17/11/2021 Sickness benefits - challenges and national strategies

Slavina Spasova gave a keynote speech on 'Sickness benefit schemes in the European Union' during a webinar of the International Social Security Association (ISSA).

22/11/2021 The distributional impact of the Green Deal

Sebastiano Sabato was invited to participate in a virtual conversation on 'The distributional impact of the Green Deal' organised by the Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations. The event, under Chatham house rules, brought together a small number of researchers, academics, and high-level EU policymakers.

27/11/2021 Inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium

Rita Baeten presented 'Inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium' during an online presentation at the Autumn Congress of the Royal Belgian Society for Stomatology and Maxillo-Facial Surgery (KBVSMFH).

29/11/2021 Health Services - on the role of Belgian healthcare for the health status of the population

Rita Baeten presented 'Health services' on the role of Belgian healthcare for the health status of the population in an online session 'Public health goods for equity', during the Public Health Review organised by the WHO and the FPS Public Health.

09/12/2021 Social and environmental aspects of national recovery plans

Sebastiano Sabato and Matteo Mandelli presented their joint work with Bart Vanhercke on 'The socio-ecological dimension of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility' during a workshop of the European Climate Foundation (ECF) and ETUI project 'Towards a new concept of the welfare state'.

6. OUTPUT DATA: THE OSE'S REACH

6.1 PUBLICATIONS

As illustrated in Table 1, the OSE team has produced 28 publications in 2021 (as compared to 13 in 2020, and 28 in 2019). The details of the OSE publications are given in Section 7 below.

Table 1. Type and number of OSE publications in 2021

<i>Type of publication</i>	<i>Number</i>
Articles	5
Papers	2
Reports	7
Book chapters	10
Digests and opinions	2
Edited volumes/books	2
Total	28

In addition, two research papers have been issued in the OSE Paper Series in 2021:

- *Bekker S. and Leschke J. (2021) Fragmented labour markets in affluent societies : Examples from Germany and the Netherlands, OSE Paper Series, Research Paper No.48, June, 48p.*
- *Frazer H., Guio A.-C. and Marlier E. (2021) Inter-generational transmission of poverty : What it is, why it matters and how to tackle it , OSE Paper Series, Research Paper No.49, October 2021, 68p.*

Publications by OSE researchers have been cited over 7,700 times in the scholarly literature, across an array of publishing formats and disciplines (Source: Google Scholar). The web search engine reports 5,006 citations of publications by OSE researchers since 2017; and 1,312 citations in 2021 alone. Google Scholar harvests publications of all types across the internet, giving students and researchers easy access to the OSE's work through the familiar format of Google. However, it should be noted that Google Scholar is largely limited to English language publications, while some OSE publications are in French and (occasionally) in Dutch.

6.2 THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: 'IMPACT'

The number of publications or citations obviously obscures the fact that some OSE publications, irrespective of whether they are quoted, may be actively used as background material (e.g. for stakeholders and policymakers) and as food for thought for internal discussions (e.g. in European institutions), while other reports (typically deliverables written for the European institutions) are cited without the author's names, but rather as 'European Commission' or 'European Economic and Social Committee'.

The following examples provide some insights into the impact of OSE publications and activities.

- The abovementioned 'Action plan to reduce inequalities in financial access to health care' (for INAMI/NIHDI) was handed over to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health Frank Vandenbroucke following a joint INAMI-OSE press release (4 October 2021). The message was taken over on various websites and by multiple media (including healthcare executive.be, Artsenkrant, Medi-sphere and De specialist). The minister referred to the priorities of the action plan to justify his policy reforms in the press (*De Standaard* newspaper). Rita Baeten also fed the conclusions of the report into the 'Multi-annual health care budgetary trajectory 2022-2024', through the Scientific Committee, which guided and supported the process.
- The draft report on the Social Imbalances Procedure (14 December 2021) was discussed during a closed expert meeting, under Chatham House rule, with experts from national Ministries of Employment and Social Affairs (EMCO/SPC members), the European Commission, the European Trade Union Confederation and ETUI. The report was widely disseminated among national delegations in the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC).
- The comparative reports produced for ESPN, ETUI and FEC during 2021 were the first comprehensive reports about the social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis (2021). These reports helped the European trade union movement (ETUC) to demonstrate that emergency measures helped avert a massive social crisis, yet they also highlighted major gaps in existing policies. The various reports also underlined the limited transformative potential of the emergency measures for countries' social protection systems.
- The OSE provided key input in Volume I of the 2021 Pension Adequacy Report (PAR) report, the fourth edition of the report prepared every three years by the SPC and the European Commission. The OSE (as a member of the Network Core Team) also supported the two-day PAR launch conference (June 2021): Slavina Spasova acted as a chair and moderator of two breakout sessions. Similar contributions were provided

by the ESPN for the previous PARs, in 2018 and 2015, PARs, while the OSE also supported the July 2018 PAR launch conference, which Bart Vanhercke chaired.

- The OSE provided a Synthesis Report with a factual overview of the access for young people to social protection schemes providing five categories of cash benefits: this report should enrich the deliberations on the rights of young people during the 2022 European Year of Youth.
- The report on the sidelining of the social actors in the Recovery and Resilience Facility for ETUI was used, at the end of 2021, as background material by the European Commission to prepare a stakeholder consultation (organised by ICF) with non-governmental organisations about the new European Semester cycle 2022. While stakeholders agreed that they have been able to reclaim a place in the process, they especially welcomed the argument that they should not only be ‘heard’, they should be ‘listened to’.

6.3 THE OSE WEBSITE: STRUCTURE AND VISITORS

The OSE website is available in English and French, and is structured as follows.

- The welcome page highlights the latest news, events, publications, activities, and appearances in the media of the OSE.
- The ‘Team’ page provides information (incl. recent publications) on most team members.
- The ‘Events’ section displays upcoming events hosted by the OSE (and affiliates), giving details of the event’s content, date, location, and contact information, as well as various network activities. Information about past events is equally available through this page.
- Many OSE publications can be accessed through the ‘[Publications](#)’ page, which provides a chronological list of published works by present and past OSE researchers, including the OSE Paper Series. Sorted by year, the prolific ‘Publications’ section displays the commitment shown by the OSE researchers to their subjects.
- On the ‘[Projects](#)’ page, interested readers can find current and past projects in which the OSE team were involved, with links to key documents and partners in OSE research.

As illustrated Table 2, the total number of *unique visitors* – which are counted only once no matter how many times they visit the site – ranged between 744 and 1,889 per month in 2021 (Matomo Web Stat). In total, some 14,452 unique visitors reached out to our website (on average 1,200/month).

The OSE website is given a light update on a two-weekly basis and is fully updated at the time of every OSE Flash News publication or new OSE event. We continue to work on the new OSE website (using Drupal Open Source content management system), to make it easier to include multimedia content and sharing functions and to manage the content, and in order to have an attractive layout on a range of devices (PC, tablet, smartphone). The new website will be launched during 2022.

Table 2: Unique visitors, page views and downloads from the OSE website in 2021

<i>Month</i>	<i>Visitors</i>	<i>Page views</i>	<i>Downloads</i>
Jan 2021	1,889	3,855	312
Feb 2021	1,161	2,096	230
Mar 2021	1,334	2,835	230
Apr 2021	1,217	2,751	288
May 2021	1,056	2,294	191
Jun 2021	1,005	1,776	154
Jul 2021	890	1,667	187
Aug 2021	744	1,375	134
Sep 2021	1,491	3,834	180
Oct 2021	1,219	2,504	387
Nov 2021	1,112	2,199	195
Dec 2021	1,334	2,741	249
Total	14,452	29,927	2,737

6.4 OSE PUBLICATIONS: DOWNLOADS

There have been 2,737 downloads from the OSE website in 2021. This relatively low number can easily be explained by the fact that the *vast majority* of OSE publications are hosted on the websites of the clients for whom the research is produced, or on websites of academic publishers⁽²⁹⁾. Thus, all ESPN report are hosted on the European Commission website (see below), while the respective volumes of ‘Social policy in the EU’ (Bilan social) are hosted on the ETUI website (ETUI also provided free physical copies of the book to interested readers). In many cases, publications can also be downloaded directly from ResearchGate. In some cases, research output is published on the OSE website, as well as on the clients’ website (e.g. reports produced for INAMI/NIHDI). In other words: the figures provided in table 2 are certainly a *vast underestimation* of the actual number of downloads of OSE publications. This point is illustrated by Table 3 and graph 1, which show the rather impressive downloads of ESPN synthesis reports from the Commission website.

30. Another reason for the relatively low number of downloads from the OSE website is that only two OSE Papers have been produced in 2021 (compared to ten papers in 2020), while these publications usually generate a high number of downloads, also of earlier publications.

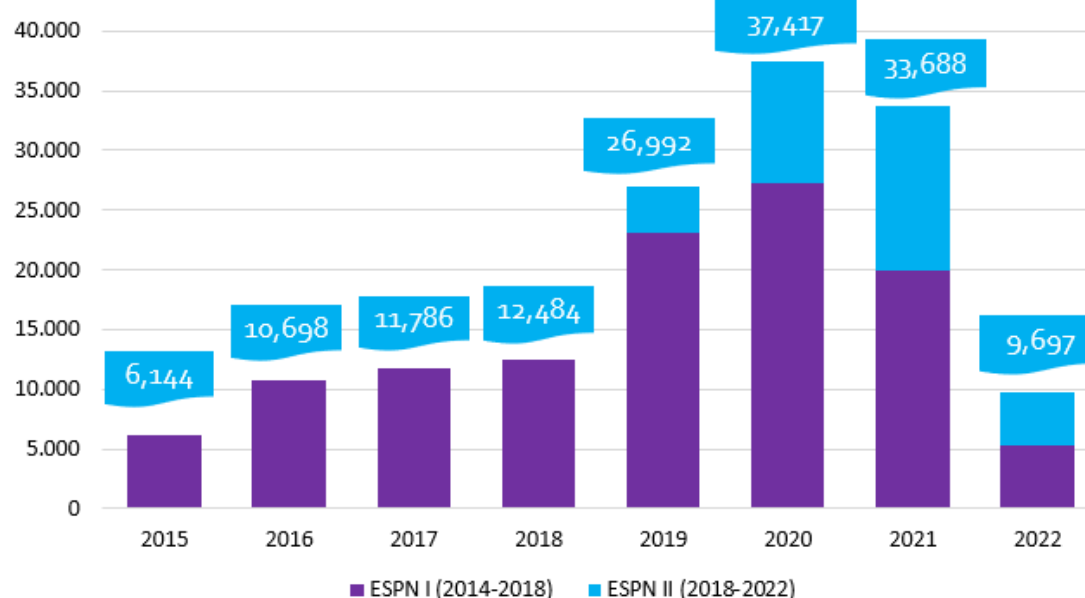
Table 3. Downloads of ESPN publications from the European Commission website

Synthesis Reports (ESPN II), 2019-2021	Downloads
Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe: A study of national policies (published in 2019)	14,072
In-work poverty in Europe: A study of national policies (published in 2019)	7,045
Social protection expenditure and its financing in Europe: A study of national policies (published in 2019)	3,463
Access to essential services for people on low incomes in Europe: An analysis of policies in 35 countries (published in 2020)	3,195
Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries (published September 2021)	3,870

Source: European Commission

Thematic Reports: Synthesis Reports (ESPN I and II)

**Number of downloaded Synthesis Reports (ESPN I and ESPN II),
by year**



Source: European Commission

6.5 OSE NEWSLETTERS

The OSE newsletter (OSE Flash News) was launched in September 2009, and the ‘European Health Care News’ in 2006.

The healthcare newsletter is sent by the NIHDI/RIZIV/INAMI to the NIHDI’s General Council and Insurance Committee, which include the key stakeholders of the Belgian national health insurance system. Additionally, it is published on the NIHDI and OSE website and disseminated by the OSE to its registered readership.

Both newsletters have continuously increased their readership, which has now reached more than 1,200 effective subscribers for the Health Newsletter (published in three languages) and more than 1,700 for the ‘OSE Flash News’ (see Table 4). In full compliance with the GDPR rules, we work with an ‘opt-in registration system’ for both newsletters. This means that the newsletter and Flash News are only sent to persons who decide to subscribe after they received an invitation to do so by e-mail.

Table 4. OSE Newsletters: 2021 readership

	Number of subscribers (opt-in)
OSE Flash News	1765
European Health Care News	1239

7. FOOD FOR THOUGHT: OSE PUBLICATIONS IN 2021

Atanasova A. (2021) Litigating fundamental rights violations at supranational courts in Europe: the role of civil society Bulgaria and Hungary, Conference proceedings, ECPR General Conference, 30 August - 3 September 2021.

Baeten R. (2021) Suppression des inégalités dans l'accessibilité financière aux soins de santé. Analyse d'une enquête réalisée auprès des experts et des parties prenantes, rapport de synthèse, Brussels, European Social Observatory, 28p.

Baeten R. (2021) Wegwerken van de ongelijkheden in de financiële toegang tot gezondheidszorg. Analyse van een bevraging van experts en belanghebbenden, Brussel, European Social Observatory, 176p.

Baeten R. (2021) Hoe maken we onze gezondheidszorg betaalbaar voor iedereen?, Samenleving & Politiek, Jaargang 28, nr. 10 (december).

Baptista I., Marlier E., Spasova S., Peña-Casas R., Fronteddu B., Ghailani D., Sabato S. and Regazzoni P. (2021) Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

Fronteddu B. et Bouget D. (2021) L'Union européenne en 2019 : les faits marquants, dans Vanhercke B., Spasova S. et Fronteddu B. (eds.) Bilan social de l'Union européenne 2020, Bruxelles, ETUI et OSE, pp. 205-218.

Fronteddu B. and Bouget D. (2021) The European Union in 2019: key events, in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. and Fronteddu B. (eds.) Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2020, Brussels, ETUI and OSE, pp. 185-197.

Fronteddu B. et Bouget D. (2021) Chronologie : la réponse de l'Union européenne à la première vague de la pandémie de Covid-19 (janvier-août 2020), dans Vanhercke B., Spasova S. et Fronteddu B. (eds.) Bilan social de l'Union européenne 2020, Bruxelles, ETUI et OSE, pp. 219-234.

Fronteddu B. and Bouget D. (2021) Chronology: the European Union response to the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (January to August 2020), in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. and Fronteddu B. (eds.) Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2020, Brussels, ETUI and OSE, pp. 199-214.

Mandelli M., Sabato S. and Jessoula M. (2021) EU Economic Governance and the Socio-Ecological Transition: Towards a More Sustainable European Semester?, Politiche Sociali/Social policies, 3/2021.

Peña-Casas R. et Ghailani D. (2021) Un cadre européen pour les salaires minimums: la solution pour contrer la progression constante de la pauvreté au travail en Europe?, in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. et Fronteddu B. (eds.) Bilan social de l'Union européenne 2020, Bruxelles, ETUI et OSE, pp. 149-170.

Peña-Casas R. and Ghailani D. (2021) A European minimum wage framework : The solution to the ongoing increase in in-work poverty in Europe?, in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. and Fronteddu B. (eds.) Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2020, Brussels, ETUI and OSE, pp. 133-153.

Sabato S. et Mandelli M. (2021) Intégrer les objectifs de développement durable dans le Semestre européen : un véritable défi en termes de gouvernance pour la Commission von der Leyen?, in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. et Fronteddu B. (eds.) Bilan social de l'Union européenne 2020, Bruxelles, ETUI et OSE, pp. 127-148.

Sabato S. and Mandelli M. (2021) Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into the European Semester : a governance conundrum for the von der Leyen Commission?, in Vanhercke B., Spasova S. and Fronteddu B. (eds.) Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2020, Brussels, ETUI and OSE, pp. 113-132.

Sabato S., Mandelli M. and Vanhercke B. (2021) The Socio-Ecological Dimension of the EU Recovery. From the European Green Deal to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Madrid, EUROsociAL Programme, EUROsociAL Collection No. 24, 63.

Spasova S. (2021) L'Europe et les syndicats bulgares, « De la survie » aux « signes de distinction » ?, in Beauvallet W., Robert C., Roullaud E. (eds.), EU affairs. Sociologie des lobbyistes européens, Peter Lang, France.

Spasova S., Ghailani D., Sabato S., Coster S., Fronteddu B. and Vanhercke B. (2021) Non-standard workers and the self-employed in the EU: social protection during the Covid-19 pandemic, Brussels, ETUI and OSE, 51p.

Spasova S., Sabato S., Ghailani D. et Fronteddu B. (2021) Travailleurs atypiques et indépendants pendant la pandémie : une protection sociale d'urgence, mais insuffisante, Démocratie n° 5, mai, pp. 2-5.

Spasova S., Sabato S., Ghailani D., Fronteddu B. et Vanhercke B. (2021) Protection sociale pendant la pandémie : les mesures prises dans l'UE pour les travailleurs atypiques et les indépendants, Cahier FEC, Bruxelles, Formation Education Culture, 60p.

Spasova S. and Vanhercke B. (2021) Old age care, in Fischer G. and Strauss R. (Eds) Europe's Income, Wealth, Consumption, and Inequality, Oxford University Press, pp. 428-451.

Vanhercke B., Spasova S. et Fronteddu B. (dir.) (2021) Bilan social de l'Union européenne 2020. Face à la pandémie de Covid-19, Bruxelles, Institut syndical européen (ETUI) et Observatoire social européen (OSE), 240p.

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