

## Coexistence between MVi and minimum incomes: assessment and proposals from social intervention practitioners

Juan M<sup>a</sup> Prieto Lobato<sup>1</sup>, Pablo de la Rosa Gimeno<sup>2</sup>

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**Summary.** The implementation of the minimum vital income (MVI) in Spain in May 2020 incorporated a new benefit into public income guarantee policies that came to coexist with others of a similar nature, objectives, and recipients, which have a long history in the Autonomous Communities: minimum incomes. While the institutional architecture underpinning these minimum incomes came under strain, the organisational mechanisms involved in their management were also shaken, and the technical mechanisms responsible for the design and implementation of social inclusion processes were affected. This article presents the results of a research study that, using a quantitative and qualitative methodology, gives a voice to the social intervention professionals who have been involved in accompanying individuals and families on their journey towards state benefits or at the intersection between state benefits and the autonomous region's income. The results explore the advances made by the MVI in terms of recognition in the fight against poverty and exclusion, but also some of its design and management limitations. They also point out some of the proposals that these professionals have made to articulate the coexistence between both benefits in the framework of future regional income guarantee system.

**Key words:** Minimum Living Income; Social Inclusion; Social Services; Social Intervention.

### [es] Convivencia entre IMV y rentas mínimas: balance y propuestas desde los profesionales de la intervención social

**Resumen.** La implantación en mayo del 2020 del Ingreso Mínimo Vital incorporó a las políticas públicas de garantía de ingresos una nueva prestación que vino a convivir con otras de similar naturaleza, objetivos y destinatarios y de amplia trayectoria en las Comunidades Autónomas: las rentas mínimas. Al tiempo que se vio tensionada la arquitectura institucional que sostenía estas rentas, se removieron los engranajes organizativos implicados en su gestión y se vieron afectados los resortes técnicos encargados del diseño e implementación de procesos de inclusión social. El presente artículo expone los resultados de una investigación que, utilizando una metodología cuantitativa y cualitativa, da voz a los profesionales de la intervención social que se han ocupado de acompañar a las personas y a las familias en su itinerario hacia la prestación estatal o en la intersección entre ésta y las rentas autonómicas. Los resultados exploran los avances que, en términos de reconocimiento en la lucha contra la pobreza y la exclusión, ha supuesto el Ingreso Mínimo Vital, pero también algunas de sus limitaciones de diseño y gestión. También se apuntan algunas propuestas que estos profesionales realizan para articular la convivencia entre ambas prestaciones en el marco de los futuros sistemas autonómicos de garantía de rentas.

**Palabras clave:** Ingreso Mínimo Vital; Rentas Mínimas; Inclusión Social; Servicios Sociales; Intervención Social.

**Sumario:** 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 3. Results. 4. Discussion. 5. Conclusions. 6. Acknowledgements. 7. Conflicts of interest. 8. References.

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<sup>1</sup> Universidad de Valladolid  
[juanmaria.prieto@uva.es](mailto:juanmaria.prieto@uva.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3922-9756>

<sup>2</sup> Universidad de Valladolid  
[pablo.rosa@uva.es](mailto:pablo.rosa@uva.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1015-8242>

## 1. Introduction

On 16 December 2021, the Congress of Deputies approved *Ley 19/2021, de 20 de diciembre, por la que se establece el Ingreso Mínimo Vital*. This approval revalidated the *Real Decreto Ley 20/2020, of 29 May*, which, in the context of the health and social crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, incorporated the minimum vital income (MVI) into the minimum income guarantee system in Spain. According to article 2 of this law, this measure “is configured as the subjective right to an economic benefit that guarantees a minimum level of income to those who are in a situation of economic vulnerability”.

Due to its definition and orientation, the MVI partly coincides in its nature, objectives, and recipients with the regional minimum incomes (RMI), which has been implemented over the last three decades to offer an income to unemployed people with no other economic resources and, within the framework of the so-called *Active Welfare State*, to facilitate their access to the labour market (Castel, 2014). However, in addition to the territorial scope of management and application, state-wide in the MVI and regional in the RMI, there are three notable differences between the two: (a) The RMI falls within the scope of management of the social services, the MVI within the social security system; (b) while the regulations governing the RMI explicitly or implicitly contemplate the double right (to receive an economic benefit and to be helped to achieve labour and social inclusion), the articles of Law 19/2021 focus the MVI on combating poverty (as a unidimensional concept centred on the lack of material and economic means); and (c) as benefits with strong conditions (Noguera, 2019, p. 14), the receipt of the RMI implies, first, a demanding income test and, second, a severe (although it may be laxer depending on the territory and even on the professional who processes it) inspection of the past, present and future employment behaviour, which does not occur in the case of the MVI.

RMI systems have been built in parallel to the evolution of regional social services systems. This explains their different territorial development and makes it necessary to recognise different RMI models that differ from one other in terms of their definition, conception, management mechanisms, extension, protective intensity, and consideration of dual entitlement, among other aspects. Although some Autonomous Communities (ACs) have undertaken significant reforms since 2015 and have introduced innovations to improve them, the RMI systems have shown different types of dysfunctions (see Arriba González de Durana & Aguilar Hendrickson, 2020; Barragué Calvo, 2009; Bollaín & Raventós, 2019), such as low coverage, problems of access (*non-take up*), limited public spending, assistance approach and direct control over beneficiaries, excessive focus on employment, insufficient tackling of the “poverty trap”, and stigmatisation of beneficiaries.

With the emergence of the MVI, in addition to the multiple challenges already posed by the RMI systems (Aguilar Hendrickson, 2021; Fernández Maíllo, 2015; Matutini, 2021; Sanzo, 2019), the autonomous regions now face the challenge of establishing mechanisms to ensure harmonious coexistence with this national benefit. The new forces the regional governments to consider whether or not to retain their RMI and, if they do, to consider whether or not to allow their compatibility with the MVI (Álvarez Cuesta, 2021). Moreover, given that *Ley 19/2021*, of 20 December, as already proposed in *Real Decreto Ley 20/2020*, opened the door to decentralised management of the MVI by means of an agreement (or, in the case of Navarre and the Basque Country, the direct assumption of the functions and services provided by the National Social Security Institute<sup>3</sup>), the ACs must also consider whether to participate in the administration of the benefit. However, they are not obliged to do so, nor, if they do, are they under any obligation to top up amounts or extend coverage to other groups (Malgesini Rey, 2021). Faced with this dilemma, Sanzo (2020) has raised three possible different scenarios: communities that want to manage the MVI without any further pretensions than including the benefit in their regional model; those that intend to incorporate it by extending protection; and those that do not want to take on the management of the benefit because of its added cost.

The heterogeneity of RMI models and approaches to minimum income guarantee policies is mirrored in the responses that the autonomous regions have proposed to deal with the uncertainty and undesired effects derived from the implementation of the MVI (De la Rosa Gimeno & Prieto Lobato, 2022). Two examples of this: (a) while some ACs have approved rules or protocols to adapt their minimum income to the new conditions generated by the MVI and others have recently approved regulations or are at a very advanced stage of design on income guarantees to undertake this adaptation, many ACs have not issued any procedures or instructions along these lines; and (b) faced with the inaction of some ACs in facilitating the compulsory transfer of RMI recipients to the MVI, others have adopted a proactive role, with support from the basic social services, requesting the state benefit *ex officio* from child benefit recipients or sending SMS messages to persons concerned.

The emergence of the MVI has not only strained the institutional architecture of the RMI systems but has also removed the technical mechanisms on which these benefits had been managed and through which the

<sup>3</sup> The País Vasco and the Autonomous Community of Navarre have been managing the benefit in their regional income guarantee system since March and April 2022, respectively.

social inclusion itineraries were accompanied. Professionals in the primary social care services (local and regional funded in almost all the autonomous regions) and in entities of the third sector of social action (TSSA) linked to the fight against poverty and social exclusion have been privileged witnesses of the repercussions that the implementation of the MVI has had on the recipients and beneficiaries of RMI and on the processes of social intervention that, although with many difficulties (Martínez Virto & Pérez Eransus, 2017), had been articulated from the consideration of a double right. Based on this circumstance, the aim of the research presented in this paper is to explore the perspectives, opinions and assessments made by professionals involved in the processing, management, and support of RMI about the limits and potential of the MVI and the challenges posed by the coexistence of both benefits.

## 2. Methodology

### Research context

Research on issues related to social intervention should seek to provide significant and relevant evidence that can serve as a basis for decision-making regarding the design, review and improvement of programmes and services, as well as providing knowledge that can be applied by professionals involved in the implementation of such devices (Acero Sáez, 1988). This dual purpose has guided the research on which this article is based, which was carried out as part of a commission from the Economic and Social Council of Castilla y León to a team of researchers from the University of Valladolid to prepare a technical scientific paper on the coexistence of the Castilla y León's minimum income and the MVI, as well as the transformations that are taking place in the care of individuals and families in a situation or at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion.

### Mixed methodology

In line with recommendations of social intervention research, this study used a mixed methodology that combined quantitative and qualitative strategies as a means of triangulation or to complete perspectives on the same object of study (Bautista López, 2009).

Table 1. Technical specifications of the study

Object	Coexistence between Autonomous Minimum Income and the Minimum Living Income
Methodology	Mixed: Quantitative and qualitative
Techniques	Documentary study Survey In-depth interviews Content analysis
Sample	Non-probabilistic. Intentional
Evidence obtained	164 completed questionnaires 17 transcripts from in-depth interviews
Information gathering	September to December 2021
Data processing	Excel Atlas.ti

Source: own elaboration.

### Research phases and techniques

In the first phase of the empirical work, a questionnaire was designed as a broad-spectrum tool (Fàbregues et al., 2016), consisting of 22 open and closed questions (using a Likert scale) arranged in three thematic blocks: general assessment of the creation of the MVI, assessment of the start-up and implementation of the MVI and proposals for improvement and coexistence between the MVI and the RMI. Using convenience or opinion sampling, the questionnaire was sent to a non-probabilistic purposive sample of 200 key informants belonging to eight ACs selected according to the level of development of their RMI systems (Rodríguez Sumaza et al., 2020) and representing different interest groups (see Table 2). The questionnaire obtained a response rate of 82% (123 fully completed questionnaires and 41 partially completed questionnaires), which allowed us to detect and identify predominant discourses and trends among professionals.

Table 2. Key informants who responded to the questionnaire

By Autonomous Community			By entity		
	N	%		N	%
Andalusia	17	10.4	Local government	26	15.9
Asturias	7	4.3	Caritas	12	7.3
Castilla y León	40	24.4	Rural Development Centre	3	1.8
Catalonia	16	9.8	Professional Association TS	2	1.2
Community of Madrid	8	4.9	Red Cross	53	32.3
Valencian Community	7	4.3	EAPN	3	1.8
Galicia	8	4.9	Fundac. Secretariado Gitano	7	4.3
Navarre	8	4.9	Other TSSA entities	7	4.3
Basque Country	15	9.1	Trade unions	5	3.0
No record	38	23.2	University	5	2.4
TOTAL	164	100.0	No record	41	25.6
			TOTAL	164	100.0
For years of experience in the field of poverty and/or social exclusion			By position in the entity		
	N	%		N	%
From 0 to 2 years	4	2.4	Direct intervention technician	70	42.7
From 3 to 5 years	18	11.0	Mid-line technician	23	14.0
From 6 to 10 years	19	11.6	Management positions	14	8.5
From 11 to 15 years	30	18.3	Researchers	5	3.0
From 16 to 20 years	15	9.1	No record	52	31.7
From 21 to 25 years	13	7.9	TOTAL	164	100.0
More than 25 years	24	14.6			
No record	41	25.0			
TOTAL	164	100.0			

Note: SW, Social Work; TSSA, third sector of social action; Source: Own elaboration.

Second, the technique of in-depth interviews was used to go deeper into the considerations and opinions collected in the questionnaires. To the extent that they seek to understand issues experienced by the subjects themselves (Kvale, 2011), they fit perfectly with the object and objectives of the proposed research. Seventeen experts selected for their experience in the coexistence between MVI and RMI with different but complementary profiles (direct intervention, management of income guarantee programmes, policymakers, and university researchers) were interviewed.

The two instruments were validated through a pretext or pilot test to determine, among others, whether the questions were understandable, whether they produced fatigue or rejection and whether the duration was adequate and to make any necessary corrections (Weiss, 1994).

### Ethical considerations

In the application of the current data protection law (*Ley Orgánica 3/2018*), the necessary measures were taken to ensure the confidential treatment of personal information. The survey was conducted with specific software that reinforced measures to guarantee data security (avoiding loss, misuse, alteration, unauthorised access, and theft) and to protect personal data in accordance with the applicable regulations. With the consent of all of the participants, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The responses to the questionnaires and the transcripts of the interviews were suitably anonymised, encrypted and hosted on secure servers.

### 3. Results

The thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) carried out focused on the systematisation, reconstruction and interpretation of the contributions obtained through both the questionnaire and the interviews. This process made it

possible to identify three thematic categories and ten subcategories. The first thematic category concerned the key informants' assessment of the effectiveness of the MVI in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The second category focused on the perceived impact of this state provision on social intervention processes. The third and final category explored the professional proposals for the configuration of the autonomous systems of the minimum income guarantee.

Table 3. Thematic categories and subcategories

Thematic category	Subcategories
Effectiveness of the MVI in tackling poverty and social exclusion situations	Effects of the implementation of the MVI on strategies to address situations of poverty and social exclusion. Impact of the MVI according to profiles of people experiencing poverty and/or exclusion. Debate on the chronification of poverty as an unintended effect of the MVI.
Perceived impact of MVI on social intervention processes	Reorientation of professional performance towards accompanying tasks in the management of the MVI. Disruption of inclusion processes. Shaping more collaborative intervention models.
Proposals to shape regional minimum income guarantee schemes	Maintenance of RMI systems. Unified management of MVI and minimum incomes. Coordination between public systems and between public systems and TSSA entities. Clarification of the roles of the actors involved.

Note: MVI, minimum vital income; RMI, regional minimum income; TSSA, third sector of social action; Source: Own elaboration.

### Effectiveness of the MVI in tackling poverty and social exclusion

The impact that the implementation of the MVI has had on situations of poverty and social exclusion was assessed in different and antagonistic ways by the professionals consulted. Some of the most positive responses (provided, for example, by informants from Andalusia, the Valencian Community and Catalonia) based their comments on the comparison with the RMI and on the recognition of the limitations and inefficiencies of some of these incomes: slow resolution processes, low amounts, and low coverage, among others. The less favourable responses were justified by the recognition that the minimum income in their AC is much more protective, and its functioning is positive, although with room for improvement (e.g., in Asturias, Navarre and Basque Country).

Other reflections, moving away from this comparative perspective, focused on the progress made by the MVI, although its management initially generated a great deal of insecurity and uncertainty among both citizens and the professionals in charge of accompanying its processing, and although its theoretical benefits have been weighed down by poor implementation. In any case, it is noteworthy that 86.1% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the inclusion of a minimum income benefit in the social security system is a very significant step in the consolidation of social rights.

*I think so. Although it may seem incredible, many family units had no income at all, as the management of the regional minimum income was, and is, very inefficient. They spend years waiting for a response and when they are asked for documentation, it is difficult to obtain it, so many files are archived or negatively resolved. (Local administration technician, Andalusia)*

The assessment of the impact of the MIV in an ambivalent way depending on the profiles of people in a situation of poverty and/or exclusion is very significant, both because it is widespread (in most of the ACs surveyed) and because of its cross-cutting nature (as noted by experts from public bodies and the TSSA, trade unions, etc.). It may be concluded from their contributions that the MVI has had a positive impact on families who had not previously received any kind of assistance (and who accessed the system for the first time with this benefit), but it has had a negative impact on extended families (with more than one cohabitation unit) and on families with a higher level of labour activation (who have been disadvantaged if they have worked in the year prior to the application). For the latter, the damage, in the estimation of those surveyed, has been three-fold: because they have not received or have lost support to meet basic needs, because they have been punished for their dedication to work and because they have been disconnected from the social services system.

*The impact has been rather negative for families who were already on the path to inclusion, accessing temporary and precarious jobs, making the regional minimum income compatible with income from work. (TSSA technical staff, Castilla y León)*

The traditional debate on the chronification effects of cash benefits also found a place among social intervention practitioners as a possible negative consequence of the MVI. A quarter (25.2%) of those surveyed mention this risk based on both economic criteria (the low quantity of the benefit prevents real personal promotion) and technical arguments (the absence of commitments on the part of the beneficiaries in terms of social inclusion). However, nearly half (48.8%) of the professionals surveyed also used economic criteria (the financial injection is essential to overcome inherited or very consolidated situations of poverty) and technical criteria (structural factors are much more decisive than personal factors in the reproduction and maintenance of social exclusion) to support a contrary position.

*In general, the possibility of having a minimum income allows beneficiaries to access socio-occupational inclusion programmes that allow them to overcome the causes that have generated the situation of vulnerability. (Local administration technician, Valencian Community)*

### **Perceived impact of MVI on social intervention processes**

According to the key informants, the situation generated by, among other circumstances, the initial confusion and uncertainty regarding the nature of the MVI, the problems of compatibility between it and the RMI and the demanding capacities and skills involved in telematic processing for a group with digital literacy problems and limited access to computer equipment has produced a triple effect on the processes of social intervention: the reorientation of professional performance towards tasks of accompaniment in the management of the MVI, the interruption of processes of inclusion and the configuration of more collaborative models of intervention.

*Many people do not know what types of aid exist because they are constantly changing, and they do not have the knowledge to make the applications themselves. In the same way, the digital divide and the socio-economic level make it difficult to access them. (Technician TSSA entity, Catalonia)*

In the first moments of the implementation of the MVI, which occurred at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, primary social care and the services of non-profit social entities were overwhelmed by demands for information, issuing of certificates, drafting of reports, support in the management and processing of the new benefit, among other tasks, which occurred simultaneously with urgent and peremptory care for individuals and families. In addition, they had to deal with the management of emergency aid, which acted as bridging benefits in the vacuum generated between the interruption of the AC's income and the resolution of state aid. Social intervention professionals, both in public services and in services linked to TSSA entities, in this volatile (due to the uncertainty) and refractory environment (the services of the National Social Security Institute remained closed and were unfamiliar with attending to people with serious difficulties in understanding the application procedures), reoriented their action by devoting a large part of their time to tasks of informing, guidance, processing support and emotional support and management:

*We have worked to accompany them through the difficult bureaucratic process. We have had to put aside the object of the intervention plans and have gone on to try to accompany them to understand and attend to their anguish in the face of the constant administrative requirements of the two administrations to which they had to respond urgently. (Local administration technician, Community of Madrid)*

The suspension, with the resolution of the MVI applications, of the inclusion agreements that, together with the receipt of the RMI, included the commitment of their holders (and, on occasions, those of the members of the family unit) to improve their training, employment, educational, health, housing and social conditions, among others, has sometimes led to the interruption of promotional actions that, in many cases, were seen by recipients more as coercive or punitive obligations and demands than as a means for or support to overcome their situation of exclusion or vulnerability. According to the professionals consulted, this process configured a new framework for social intervention in which the relationship with individuals and families is maintained out of their interest and express wish and not because of the obligation to respond to the demands associated with the receipt of the financial benefit. In these context, the tasks of the assistance process are detached from those of control, the benefit is no longer considered a tool of pressure and, consequently, more intense work with individuals and families is made possible to follow itineraries oriented towards social inclusion:

*The MVI can be an opportunity to change the paradigm of intervention in social services, where people come because they are motivated, because they perceive that social services can help them in their inclusion process.*

*And not only to comply in an obligatory way, in some cases routinely, without very positive effects, with the objectives set in the Individualised Insertion Plan in order not to lose the benefit. (TSSA entity technician, Castilla y León)*

These reflections are consistent with the fact that 77.6% of respondents agreed that the regions should be responsible for coordinating social intervention processes with recipients for their social promotion and integration. Two approaches stand out in the preferential focus on social support: the aforementioned technical inappropriateness of making a financial benefit designed to guarantee basic income and subsistence conditional on a personal or family commitment to inclusion, and the ethical conviction that these are two separate entitlements that individuals may exercise according to their needs, interests and wishes. However, it was also observed that, for 64.4% of those surveyed, the obligatory nature of a counterpart requirement could be understood as a means to work on the processes of change, autonomy and integration, among others, always only under two premises: the existence of reciprocal commitments between the professional and the beneficiary person; and the adoption and adaptation of the obligations and objectives to the circumstances of the person and their environment.

*The commitment must be reciprocal on both sides (...). I understand that the work with the person starts from his commitment to improvement, and on the part of the agents from the collaboration, guidance and help in this process. (TSSA entity technician, Basque Country)*

### **Proposals for shaping regional minimum income guarantee systems**

Nearly three quarters (72.8%) of respondents considered that the RMI should be maintained and should coexist with the MVI. The statements thus emphasised two aspects that distinguish these systems from the MVI and make them more appropriate from the point of view of the fight against poverty and social exclusion: the possibility of guaranteeing the double right (to the financial benefit and to help for social inclusion) and their inclusive potential (working with the involvement of the people concerned on labour insertion and community integration). Furthermore, according to key informants, RMI can also reinforce the protective capacity of the MVI by two routes to be followed in each AC: the transition from subsidiarity to complementarity (assuming an objective of extending coverage, improving the amounts, and adapting the conditions of permanence); and the transformation of its nature (becoming complements for housing, training, transport and activation for employment).

*I consider that the ACs retain competences in social inclusion and that this should be their action, so that greater coverage of the MVI should not imply a withdrawal of the ACs. The Autonomous Regions are not only responsible for fighting poverty, but also for promoting social inclusion, and they have a great opportunity to invest in this area. (UPNA researcher, Navarre)*

Coordination between public systems (social services and the National Social Security Institute) and between these and the entities of the TSSA emerges as a particularly relevant issue. There are many proposals calling for the unified management of both benefits (i.e. a “one-stop shop”), suggesting that the processing of the RMI should always be a prior step for the application for and, where appropriate, access to the MVI. This would simplify the application process, speed up the resolution procedure to prevent families from being left without coverage, reduce serious unnecessary damage (e.g. the misnamed “undue charges”) and reduce situations of defencelessness.

*Let there be only one: lets reach agreements so that the two administrations propose a single income that guarantees the coverage of basic needs. (Local administration technique, Navarre)*

For those consulted, effective coordination requires a demanding exercise in clarifying the roles of the agents involved: social services, social security and TSSA organizations. The social services system is called upon to provide a service of information, guidance and help in processing the MVI, complemented with more intense interventions of social activation, accompaniment in inclusion itineraries and community work (among others) and must also assume a leadership role in the multidimensional approach to exclusion, working in a network with other mechanisms (housing, health, training, employment), with services from different administrations and with social entities.

*They should have this role of individual and family accompaniment to inclusion resources, both economic, housing, training, community, etc., and design the itinerary in the different areas agreed with the protagonists; users demand advice and accompaniment in accessing resources that are adapted to their particular situation and in the progress of inclusion in the different dimensions affected. (Local administration technician, Castilla y León)*

There was also a widespread conviction that the tasks of managing these benefits should fall exclusively to entities linked to the management of economic benefits, such as social security. The reasons for this assertion have to do with the definition of the purpose of social services, the need to reduce bureaucracy and the benefits of disconnecting access to and maintenance of a financial benefit from the social intervention process. At the root of this is the conviction, supported by 41.7% of those surveyed, that access to a financial benefit for subsistence should be considered without any conditions, as a basic and universal right.

*I believe that it should be managed entirely by the social security system, it should be one more benefit in the pillar of social protection at the state level of social security. If we place it in the social services, we will be generating a level of income guarantee for the poor. (Local administration technician, Valencian Community)*

Finally, 75% of those surveyed considered that the participation of the TSSA is necessary and strategic due to its knowledge of the reality and its know-how in group and community work, but it must always take place in close collaboration with the social services to safeguard the public nature of the benefits. In any case, when supporting the participation of non-profit organisations in the implementation of minimum income guarantee benefits, it was often insisted that the organisations should be subject to recognition, but also to certification and supervision by public agents and that under no circumstances should the precariousness of the organisations or the professionals who work in them be accepted.

*This is transferring responsibilities to the third sector, which supports itself. It is up to the public social services to carry out this task. No privatisation of public obligations. (Local administration technician, Navarre)*

#### 4. Discussion

This research has shown the disparity in the perception of the experts consulted about the effectiveness of the MVI in tackling situations of social exclusion and poverty. In our study we were able to verify that key informants from ACs, which at the time of the appearance of the MVI had advanced models of the RMI, rated this effectiveness less highly than those who contextualised their analysis in ACs with weak models (Rodríguez Sumaza et al., 2020). The results provided by our work are also consistent with the preliminary analyses carried out by other researchers (Aguilar Hendrickson & Arriba González de Durana, 2021) one year after the implementation of the state provision.

The implementation of this benefit has the virtue of establishing a common ground for the protection against the most extreme situations of poverty, but it does not seem to have overcome the distinction between people in need, unemployed people, and households at risk of exclusion (Arriba González de Durana & Aguilar-Hendrickson, 2021). In this line, our research revealed that some families have managed to access the system for the first time through the MVI, but others, such as those with greater labour activation, have been disadvantaged by the restrictive access criteria set out in its initial design. This circumstance prompted those interviewed to call for measures to stimulate employment and compatibility with wage income to prevent and tackle the so-called “poverty trap” (Zalakaín Hernández, 2021).

In parallel to this reflection, most of the informants questioned the axiom that underpins the accommodating tendencies of economic benefits in their recipients. Their assessments, in this regard, coincided with the conclusions reached by empirical approaches to RMI (Ayala Cañón et al., 2016): there is insufficient evidence to support the idea that these incomes discourage the search for employment and that they generate problems of chronification. On the contrary, the people assisted in voluntary aid processes tend to adopt, in accordance with a logic of inclusive reciprocity, an active attitude to meet society’s expectations (Soler Tormo, 2021). These reflections call into question the conditionality that, although it continues to give rise to conflicting opinions regarding its basis and justification (Vicente et al., 2022), is present in many benefits in the social services portfolios and permeates our cultural frameworks (Carrera et al., 2021).

The emergence of the MVI has fuelled reflection on what the new regional income guarantee systems should be like. The analysis of the discourse of the key informants allowed us to recognise the commitment to systems that ensure the coverage of a wide range of needs (from food and clothing to access to housing and educational, health and cultural services) and that guarantee gradual protection (depending on the different income strata) and are adapted to the cost of living in each territory. These systems must also, however, promote the coordination of the different agents involved and between the different services called upon to work on social inclusion processes.

These contributions converge with the proposals made by other researchers: Aguilar Hendrickson (2021) and Fernández Maíllo (2015), for example, advocated the construction of *multi-government* and *multi-benefits* structures that articulate the participation of the different public administrations and TSSA entities and that address the needs – of a periodic or ad hoc nature – that affect day-to-day life. In this proposal, the state level is responsible for guaranteeing a basic minimum income of an equal amount at national level, and the regional



authorities contribute to this objective with their RMI, raising the guaranteed amounts to an adequate level for basic current expenses in each territory (Montes, 2020) and improving the inclusive capacity of the minimum benefit. Local corporations complement the protective effort by articulating benefits for training, transport, housing, and employment expenses (Azcona-Martínez & Martínez-Virto, 2022; EAPN, 2021) and certify, where appropriate, the fulfilment of requirements for access to the RMI that are difficult or impossible to accredit. The entities of the TSSA, for their part, collaborate in the processes of accompaniment for inclusion.

The interviews with experts with experience in social services also revealed the important role played by professionals from primary social care services and the TSSA entities in providing information on requirements, facilitating the submission of applications and overcoming difficulties in accessing social security offices, among other tasks, in an attempt to limit the negative consequences of the digital divide that separates applicants for these benefits from the administration and perpetuates economic, social and political inequalities (Molala & Makhubele, 2021; Sanders & Scanlon, 2021). The simplification and streamlining of application and processing procedures and the fight against administrative violence (EAPN, 2022) should, following this line of argument, be a key strategic objective of income guarantee schemes.

In the complex flow of information and documentation in the minimum income guarantee systems, the primary social services should, according to those interviewed, distance themselves from the tasks of managing benefits to dedicate themselves to designing and articulating processes of social inclusion. This reorientation would provide a response to some of the main problems faced by professionals of territorially based social services: bureaucratisation, reduction of care times, increase in control functions and overload of care work, among others. These circumstances have curtailed the possibilities of carrying out comprehensive and integrated care, with complex management and demanding investment of time and effort (Martínez Virto & Pérez Eransus, 2017). Social services could, therefore, take on the important challenge of boosting community capital and networking in the promotion of alternatives for social inclusion (Jaraíz Arroyo, 2012) and could contribute to reducing the discontinuity and gaps between income guarantee programmes and social inclusion and labour market insertion programmes (Laparra & Martínez Sordoni, 2021). Although the integration and concentration of services exceeds the competence of the social services system (Lara Montero et al., 2016), experiences such as the Plan Integral del Polígono Sur (Jaraíz Arroyo & Zugasti Mutilva, 2021), the ERSISI project (Martínez Sordoni, 2022), the PACT (Bayón Calvo et al., 2018) or the Mesa de Instituciones Sociales en Acción Social de Elda (Martínez López & Sánchez Carbonell, 2019) have shown that, in different areas and with very different orientations, alternative routes to the institutional, organisational and professional intervention model limitations of local social services can be explored.

## 5. Conclusions

In a recent work on social cohesion and the social consequences of COVID-19 in Spain, Ayala Cañón et al. (2022) raised questions regarding the implementation of the MVI, including how it has worked, what its institutional deficits are, what the role of the social services and the TSSA in its development has been and how the MVI has been interrelated with the RMI. These are precisely the questions that have guided the work on which this article is based. The answers have been sought from some of the most prominent protagonists in this process: the direct and indirect intervention professionals who have been involved in accompanying individuals and families facing the complex, demanding and intricate task of applying for the MVI in a scenario of uncertainty and lack of information, with telematic procedures that were alien to them and, in many cases, impossible to complete.

The work presented here has made it possible to explore the scenario of coexistence between the MVI and the RMI from a twofold perspective: an evaluative perspective, or an assessment of the weaknesses and limitations of the implementation of the state benefit in terms of the fight against poverty and the promotion of inclusive processes; and a proactive perspective, or a perspective of contributions to face the challenges arising from the juxtaposition of both benefits within the framework of regional social protection systems.

From the evaluative point of view, there has been a certain scepticism regarding the potential of the MVI to overcome the poverty threshold, as the amounts of this benefit have been recognised as insufficient to cover basic needs and household supplies. The limitations in its definition and the difficulties in accessing it have also implied an unequal impact on families, especially those with a higher level of labour activation. However, in addition to valuing the important progress made in the consolidation of rights, securing an income is considered the first step towards developing a process of change and improvement. Thus, by detaching the process of assistance from the tasks of control, the way is opened to configure a new relational approach between professionals and people, and this approach will act as a fundamental vector in the processes of social inclusion.

From a proactive perspective, some key ideas have been identified to configure the regional income guarantee systems: the RMI should not only be maintained, but is called upon to fulfil important functions of complementarity, extension, adaptation and guarantee of the double right; the simplification of access systems is a priority, as is reducing administrative violence; an adequate definition of the functions to be carried out by

the different agents involved should be made; and the integration of services in the territory should be contemplated as a condition, not just as a possibility.

In the design of the institutional architecture of these systems, social services have a window of opportunity to reorient their action towards accompanying individuals and families in their inclusion itineraries, towards the construction of integrating processes based on community capital and the promotion of networking in the multidimensional approach to social exclusion. Thus described, the remit of the social services would favour objectives that have been recognised as identity principles and that, paradoxically, had been losing presence at the expense of bureaucratic, management and control tasks, which are so far removed from the preventive and promotional essence of social intervention.

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## 7. Conflicts of interest

The authors acknowledge no conflict of interest in the design and execution of the study, nor in the presentation and dissemination of the results.

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