

# COVID-19 and biometric ID: implications for social protection

## Roundtable Proposal – TILting Perspectives 2021

### Track: Regulating Emerging Technologies: Governance Beyond Data Protection

The question on data justice implications of COVID-19 responses has been dealt with by recent works (cf. Taylor, Sharma, Martin & Jameson, 2020) in the aftermath of the WHO declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Taylor et al. (2020) investigate such responses in the light of the notions of function creep, i.e. the repurposing of existing digital systems to track, predict and influence, and market-making for large private software developers in the new architectures of epidemiological surveillance. Among the data justice problems opened by COVID-19, an important stream of questions is raised in terms of implications of the pandemic for digital systems of social protection.

Biometric social protection generates a trade-off where purported effectiveness, mostly in the form of accurate targeting, comes at the cost of greater exclusions of entitled beneficiaries (Muralidharan et al., 2020). As COVID-19 hits vulnerable populations worldwide, the trade-off of biometric social protection does not support social protection efforts, as systems are called to face greater vulnerable populations who demand immediate assistance. Rather than narrower targeting, social protection systems need adaptations to avoid the remaking and perpetuation of injustice, as cases from diverse world regions have illustrated (cf. Cerna Aragon, 2020; Dreze, 2020; Lopez; 2020). As a result, COVID-19 opens a whole new set of questions on how biometric social protection is set to change in response to the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, this roundtable proposal invites contributions on experiences of biometric social protection systems during COVID-19. We are interested in contributions from diverse countries and regions, illustrating how social protection systems have evolved during the pandemic and the roles that digital technologies have played in such evolution. We aim at putting together a roundtable of experts from worldwide, accompanied by a team of commentators to ask questions and stimulate debate. Discussion will then be extended to the online audience.

For roundtable speakers, we invite abstracts (150-200 words) touching upon:

- The country's social protection system – its main traits;
- How these traits have evolved during COVID-19;
- Roles digital technologies have played in such evolution;
- Consequences of such evolution for beneficiaries under crisis.

We reserve to form a roundtable of geographically diverse contributions, and a team of discussants to sustain debate in the session. Abstracts for proposed contributions are due on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021.

## References

Cerna Aragon, D. (2020). On not being visible to the state: The case of Peru. COVID-19 from the Margins, <https://data-activism.net/2020/06/bigdatasur-covid-on-not-being-visible-to-the-state-the-case-of-peru/>.

Drèze, J., (2020). The perils of an all-out lockdown. The Hindu, 23 March 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-perils-of-an-all-out-lockdown/article31136890.ece>

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Muralidharan, K., Niehaus, P., & Sukhtankar, S. (2020). Balancing corruption and exclusion: Incorporating Aadhaar into PDS. *Ideas for India*, <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/balancing-corruption-and-exclusion-incorporating-aadhaar-into-pds.html>.

Taylor, L., Sharma, G., Martin, A., and Jameson, S. (Eds.) (2020). What does the COVID-19 response mean for data justice? In *Data Justice and COVID-19: Global Perspectives*, London: Meatspace Press, pp. 8-18.