

# WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis  
A collective work by CES



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Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Universidade de Coimbra



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# PANDEMIC, PRECARIOUSNESS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

João Pedroso

The social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the growth of social inequalities, as unemployment rose in its multiple forms, in particular amongst “dependent” or “self-employed” precarious workers (in probation, in temporary work, “green receipts” of independent workers, in electronic platforms, autonomous and intermittent workers of in the arts sector, etc.) of the formal and informal economy (housework, tourism, catering, odd jobs in repairs, etc.).

The vast majority of these workers do not have access to unemployment benefits, either because there is no formal employment relationship or because they have not accumulated enough days of social security contributions to meet the current system’s terms. Moreover, they are also sometimes not entitled to any other social benefits from citizenship social protection schemes, except for the odd support from public social services or third sector entities.

These precarious and vulnerable people could thus, in the short term, add to the approximately 113 million people at risk of poverty and social exclusion and the approximately 25 million children living below the poverty line in the European Union.

In the face of these precarious and vulnerable situations, public social security policy must, on the one hand, intensify the responses to

the current situation and to the urgent crisis posed by the risk of social fracture, and, on the other hand, plan, in structural and future terms, a redesign of the social security systems.

Among the first measures mentioned, it is urgent to amend the existing social security systems for unemployment benefit and minimum income benefit, in order to: 1) include more dependent and self-employed workers in access to unemployment benefit and unemployment social benefit; 2) establish the right to a guaranteed minimum income benefit (now RSI – Social Integration Income) capable of ensuring that the basic needs of any person are met, with the proviso that, where the person is fit for work, this benefit should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.

Among the structural and forward-looking measures, it is fundamental, in the short term, to redesign contributory social security schemes (general and independent) and non-contributory or citizenship social protection schemes. In this way, social security benefits, with different natures and financing methods, would be anchored as rights of their beneficiaries to meet the income needs of the precarious and the vulnerable when these do not have an economic activity, thus avoiding an increase in inequalities and more people risking poverty.