1. Introduction

An increasing number of developing countries have been adopting social protection programmes in recent decades.¹ These social protection programmes offer a range of monetary benefits and services targeted towards the neediest sections of the population. While monetary benefits are channelled through cash transfer programmes, other programmes offer specialised services such as meeting the specific needs of children, the elderly, and the people living with disabilities. In terms of coverage, social protection programmes can be universal when the entire population is eligible for cash benefits or they can be geographically targeted where the

¹. Economic inclusion report 2020 world bank
entire population of a specified area can access the programme. At the other end of the spectrum, social protection can also be categorical responding to the exclusive needs of persons with certain characteristics such as age, disability or gender. However, for social protection programmes to succeed in the initial process of determining potential eligibility of beneficiaries through the delivery chain spread over the outreach, intake, registration, assessment of their needs and conditions are pre-requisites. This crucial first step involves establishing a national registry to ensure these processes along the delivery chain of a social protection programme. The National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) established under the BISP unconditional cash transfer programme is one such example. Social registries have been defined as information systems that support outreach, intake, registration, and determination of potential eligibility of applicants for one or more social programmes. Despite different mandates of social protection programmes, social registries are common to all social protection programmes and forms the basis of eligibility and programme enrolment.

However, intake and registration of new applicants are faced with many challenges ranging from low literacy level of potential beneficiaries, cost and design of outreach, intake and registration approach in resource-poor settings, fiscal space, and political priorities of government. Conceptually, social registries can be conceived as social policy tools offering a gateway for potential inclusion into a governmental social protection programme as well serving, operationally and functionally, as information systems. Currently there are two major social registry types based on manner of outreach, intake and registration of new beneficiaries.

One type of social registry relies on the en masse registration or census style registration where registration is opened after a specified period, usually 4 to 5 years. This social registry is generally referred to as term static or fixed list registry because of the static snapshot of data gathered at a particular period in time. In the case of static social registry, data are usually refreshed after a gap of 4 to 5 years through another census style registration drive. NSER operated by the BISP programme is categorised as a static social registry.

On the other hand, a social registry relying on on-demand and continuing registration processes open throughout the year is generally termed as dynamic because data and registration are a continuous process. As poverty and vulnerability of households is dynamic and fluctuating, dynamic social registry offers the opportunity to capture these changes and adjust the social protection programme lists of beneficiaries and benefits accordingly. Dynamic social registries also ensure better targeting and inclusiveness.

Globally, different countries have adopted different types of social registries in line with national social protection specificities, fiscal space and governmental policies. Yet the trend towards dynamic social registries is accelerating to keep pace with the ever-changing dynamics of poverty and vulnerability in households as well as new breakthroughs in technology. The NSER is also trialling a dynamic inclusion approach in its fresh new en masse survey currently underway.
2. Social Registries: Global Landscape

In recent decades the developing world has witnessed a proliferation of social assistance programmes.

Functions of Social Registries in the Social Protection Delivery Chain

Despite gradual institutionalisation, social protection systems remain fragmented. However, the trend towards integration of the various phases of the social assistance delivery chain is growing. Social registries have been defined as information systems that support outreach, intake, registration, and determination of potential eligibility for one or more social programmes. As shown in figure 1, they have both a social policy role as inclusion systems, and an operational and functional role as information systems. As an inclusion system, social registries offer a “gateway” for individuals and families for potential inclusion into a social programme based on their needs and socio-economic conditions. As an inclusion system, social registries have evolved in their inclusionary intent and coverage functions over time. However, coverage of social registries differs across countries. In some countries such as Pakistan and Chile, social registries cover a large chunk of the population. In other countries such as Montenegro, Indonesia, and Turkey, coverage extends to one third or one half of the population. As information systems, social registries support registration and determination of potential eligibility for social programmes. Looked at another way, social registries also perform the upstream function of determining the targeting, eligibility criterion, the downstream functions of administering benefits, and integrating information systems.

Figure 1: Social Registries Support Determination of Potential Eligibility within the Delivery Chain for Social Programs (dark shaded areas)

Assess
Provision of Information

Intended Population
All Registrations (or Applications)
Potentially Eligible Application
Beneficiaries

Implement
Transactions for Payment & Services
Case Management

Assess
Potential Eligibility
Outreach
Intake & Registration
Assess Needs & Conditions

Decide
Enrollment
Benefits & Service Package

Source: Social Registries for social assistance, World Bank Group, Washington DC

Social registries – typologies across the globe

One authoritative study found different typologies of social registries in the 20 countries it examined. The key differentiating feature of social registries is whether the primary method for intake and registration is via en masse registration whereby census-style registration sweep after a fixed period is employed or whether the intake and registration process involves demand, open and continuing registration. Many systems use a mix of on-demand and en masse methods. In the study conducted of the 20 countries, there was an even split between the countries using on-demand and en masse registration with Pakistan falling into the en masse registration category while Chile, Columbia, and China were categorised as dynamic registries (Figure 2).

Static or en masse registries vs Dynamic social registries or on-demand registries

The key drawback of fixed registries is that scheduled registration sweeps are spaced every 4-5 years, with the exception of Costa Rica, Colombia, Indonesia, and Mexico where registration sweeps are conducted every two years. However, as these deadlines often are not met due to financial and logistical problems, data becomes progressively outdated. Therefore, in between the two registration sweeps, there is no flexible or continuing registration system in place to capture the changing dynamics of the already registered households in terms of change of circumstance, death, divorce or other life cycle events. Since vulnerability and poverty are dynamic in nature, static social registries relying on a static snapshot of data are unlikely to meet the changing needs of the registered households. Static registries also run the risk of errors of exclusion and inclusion with the passage of time as the snapshot of the data collected at a particular point in time becomes outdated. On the contrary, social registries with the principle of dynamic inclusion built into them increase their responsiveness, targeting and inclusiveness of people in need of social protection, and are better able to respond dynamically to life cycle events such as job loss, disability, and pandemic or disaster.

Figure 2: Static or En Masse Registry vs Dynamic Social Registries or On-Demand Registry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamic Social Registries</th>
<th>Static Social Registries</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Azerbaijan VEMTAS</td>
<td>- Colombia SISBEN</td>
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<td>- Brazil Cadastro Unico</td>
<td>- Dominican Republic SIUBEN</td>
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<td>- Chile RSH in SIIS</td>
<td>- Pakistan NSER</td>
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<td>- China’s Dibao Registry</td>
<td>- Philippines LISTAHANAN</td>
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<td>- Colombia SISBEN on demand window</td>
<td>- Djibouti RSU</td>
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<td>- Georgia TSA Registry</td>
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<td>- Sierra Leone SPRINT</td>
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<td>- Yemen SWF Registry</td>
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Source: Barca, V., Hebbar, M. (2020) "On demand and up to date? Dynamic inclusion and data updating for social assistance", GIZ

6. Ibid
7. Valentine, B, Madumitha, H (2020), On demand and up to date? Dynamic inclusion and data updating for social assistance, GIZ
3. Dynamic Social Registries

Why a dynamic social registry?

In a nutshell, as well as offering improved and continuing access to the poorest and most vulnerable groups, dynamic registries are less costly to run as compared to static social registries which involve huge outlays on en masse registration drives. Dynamic social registries also assist with continuing data updates and are essentially democratic since everyone has the right to be registered at any time. More importantly, a dynamic registry approach adds to the long-term goal of building up permanent staff and staff capacity. Dynamic social registries also fulfil the purpose of realising universal social protection and the human rights agenda enshrined in the UN human rights principles and Sustainable Development Goals which the UN members have signed. Dynamic inclusion in social registries also conform closely with the universal social protection vision - ‘where anyone who needs social protection can access it any time’.

Dynamic social registries: Global approaches and practices

Dynamic or on-demand approaches to intake, registration, and assessment coupled with continuous and periodic updating of data have historically been accorded less than due attention in the literature. However, there is a growing body of literature available now based on the experiences of many countries that have incorporated on demand approaches from the very beginning of social protection programmes.

Available literature on on-demand registration or dynamic registration identifies the following main approaches.

Periodic active outreach

This approach has been adopted by countries lacking fiscal and administrative capacity to establish permanent on-demand registration structures. In these countries periodic outreach is intermittently employed to proactively encourage old registrants to update information and new registrants. This approach, while not exactly conforming to text book definition of on-demand registration, nonetheless ensures that systems are at least partially dynamic. Active outreach is managed through temporarily staffed rotating desks set up at designated locations and coupled with home visits, giving new applicants the opportunity to register themselves within a stipulated time period. Areas of low uptake and high vulnerability are usually prioritised. The periodicity associated with this approach varies widely. In most cases, communities are targeted based on their level of remoteness and vulnerability. In some countries, periodic outreach is oriented towards micro areas that are more vulnerable to shocks and stressors.

The Periodic Active Outreach approach is the best suited for countries where permanent local offices do not exist, or distances are too far to thinly spread or remote offices. Temporary ‘rotating desks’, less costly than permanent offices, can overcome these challenges. This approach can be a strong complement to on demand registration in areas where there is sizable pocket of hard-to-reach areas and groups.

In Zambia, the Social Cash Transfer Scheme used a mechanism whereby potentially eligible households are encouraged to visit designated points at specific times to register. The registration process is followed by a community meeting to ensure that no household is left behind. Usually, outreach activities precede the registration process.

Mexico’s Sistema de Focalization de Desarrollo (SIFODE) social registry prioritises frequent registration in areas with a high degree of marginalisation and/or indigenous populations.

Brazil employs innovative strategies for ‘Busca Ativa’ (active search) whereby especially vulnerable groups (e.g., indigenous people, river-communities in the Amazon, street children, etc.) are periodically prioritised for inclusion into social registry via active outreach.

Continuous on-demand registration

Continuous on-demand registration is one of the major approaches being employed to make social registries fully dynamic. This approach ensures that registration for new applicants is open throughout the year allowing applicants to register at any time convenient for them.

Continuous on-demand registration can take one of the following forms or routes.

Permanent local offices of the programme

This approach is adopted by countries that boast of permanent local offices for cash transfer programmes. These offices provide continuous, on-demand registration for cash transfer, and social protection programmes. Though, these arrangements have been given different names in different settings ranging from one-stop shops, single window services or citizen service centres, they share a systematic and unified approach to outreach, registration, and data updating which is either user-triggered or office-staff-triggered.

Continuous and on-demand registration is usually available through the year round permanent local offices of the programme. Where these offices are available, the permanent local staff uses the opportunity of every incidence of contact with programme beneficiaries to update their information. For example, Mexico’s Prospero programme uses the first payment period of the year to ask beneficiaries if there have been any changes to the currently held information via a unique updating form.

Deconcentrated local welfare offices

One popular approach to intake and registration is to operate a network of deconcentrated local welfare offices run by a central welfare ministry. These offices offer round the year opportunity for beneficiary-led registration as well as data updating. Most of the former USSR states offered examples of this approach. Mauritius and South Africa also run a version of this arrangement. Though these deconcentrated offices have the advantage of building up permanent administrative capacity and sectoral knowledge and expertise for social protection schemes, low confidence, and discriminatory attitudes of the permanent staff toward certain ethnic groups such as Adivasis in Bangladesh and Roma in Moldova can undermine the inclusivity purpose of on-demand registration approach.

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The permanent local offices can work under one of the following arrangements:

'Single door' or 'one-stop-shop' approach draws together different agencies under one roof

'Single window' approach seeks to empower one institution to deliver services on behalf of different service providers

'Single broker' approach involves addition of a coordination layer (a broker) to ease the user experience


In South Africa, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) operates 389 permanent local offices and 1,163 'service points' (mobile or fixed infrastructure, where registration, enrolment, and updating services are rendered on a rotating basis according to a schedule throughout the country.

In Mauritius applicants can register with the Social Registry through 34 local offices of the Ministry of Social Security and National Solidarity. On-demand registration services are provided for all programmes, irrespective of whether they are administered by the Ministry.

In Georgia, the Social Services Agency (SSA) runs local and regional welfare offices which offer on-demand registration services. The application is followed by a home visit by a social welfare officer.

In Colombia, the System of Identification of Social Program Beneficiaries (SISBEN) social registry produces a household vulnerability index, based on data from a census sweep conducted every three years. The country’s 1,100 municipalities are responsible for the management of SISBEN in their territories. Specifically, they are responsible for processing new applications and updating existing beneficiaries’ data on a rolling basis. Citizens can travel to municipal centres to register or request a home visit.

While this approach to dynamic inclusion has the advantage of municipal offices being more accessible and widespread than a handful of thinly spread district welfare offices, it has the disadvantage of loosening central control over the registration process. For example, the Kyrgyzstan Republic has recently decided to roll back municipal-led registration process by transferring responsibility back to district offices to enhance control and coordination.

Municipal offices

This approach involves new registrations and old registration updates for social assistance programme including cash transfer via trained staff within local municipal offices. This approach works the best in countries where local government offices and devolved systems of government are solidly in place and the central government only creates a common framework and provides training. Many Latin American countries have adopted this approach and rolled it out at scale.

Brazil’s 5,570 municipalities are at the front and centre in the management of the Cadastro Onico social registry. The municipalities collect and update data using a combination of agents: (a) fixed service stations called Centres de Referencia de Assistencia Social (Social Assistance Reference Centres), (b) home visits to families; and (c) mobile service stations, including registration task forces. The municipalities carry out a broad set of activities, including identification of low-income areas, registration, data collection, data updating, verification, training, and outreach. They provide the team and equipment, whereas the federal agent provides the software, data bank and broader digital infrastructure. The Ministry of Social Development provides regulation, training, and interoperability between Cadastro Unico and other government databases, monitoring financing to the local governments and payments to the federal payment agent. By law, registered information must be updated (recertified) every 24 months (from the date of last interview) or whenever there is a change in the family’s composition, address or socioeconomic conditions.

Digital windows

As administrative systems surrounding intake and registration system are complex to navigate for the vulnerable
and less educated applicants, advances in technology offer the potential for enhanced uptake and dynamic inclusion through streamlining and integration data registration and data updating information systems. Advanced countries are way ahead in this by making online application processes simple and accessible through open and e-government systems. Many countries in the developing world are increasingly adopting digital window routes for intake and registration and data updating purposes. However, it is important to point out that digital windows complement other systems of registration already in place.

Digital windows also offer the advantage of wider accessibility and privacy for applicants in countries where internet connections are widely available. One of the major limitations of digital windows is that they are not applicable to settings where internet penetration is low. Digital windows are further hampered by higher levels of illiteracy, exclusionary practices, and low uptake of digital services. For example, in Chile, 68 percent of applicants preferred to update their information through local offices despite the availability of the digital window option. Moreover, some countries are also hobbled by legislation which does not allow digital windows options to be made available within the given legislative framework. South Africa makes registration mandatory through the SASS system in the presence of an official and there is no legislative provision within existing legislation for digital window option to be activated.

In Azerbaijan, an electronic application accepts application continuously online as part of the broader Transparency agenda. The new system is completely paperless, as the system collects data from 21 different entities, including the Ministry of Taxes, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Agriculture. Applicants can access the VEMTAS either on personal communication devices, through special e-government info kiosks, or at post offices. Applicants are informed via SMS of the success of their application within 15 days. The system is not fully electronic, however, intermittent verification is completed through a home visit by the social agent.

Integration of existing databases

Existing administrative databases offer opportunities for either supporting or triggering continuous registration beside ensuring data updates. This data exchange can occur either through interoperability, whereby, data exchange between different databases is continuous or through ad-hoc data sharing arrangement via email or USB. However, true integration of data can be achieved through a unique national identity number which is becoming quite ubiquitous. Civil registration, vital statistics, and unique ID numbers are the various ways in which databases can be integrated.

Civil registration and vital statistics and ID

A well-oiled civil registration or up-to-date national identification system can act as a platform for registration in the case of lifecycle-linked social transfers (such as child grants or old age social pensions). The advantage of this approach lies in designing proactive benefit systems, i.e., systems that automatically initiate registration and subsequent enrolment, without expecting citizens to proactively apply. However, there are few instances of countries adopting this approach except for Mongolia. While this approach has the advantage of lowering data collection costs and ensuring high quality data as well updates, a majority of developing countries lack robust civil registration and vital statistics (CVRS) systems which undermine the wider applicability of this approach. There are many ways in which data integration of CVRS and ID data bases leads to triggering, informing registration, and triggering programme exit as well.

Mongolia implemented a universal child benefit programme called the Universal Child Money Programme between 2012-2016. All children were automatically enlisted into the programme as soon as they were registered at the Civil Registration Department. The integrated data system ensured that payments were automatically discontinued once children reached 18 years of age. This enrollment drive led to nearly 100% of children aged 0-17 years receiving this benefit in 2015.
In South Africa, death registrations maintained within the Home Affairs population database are cross-checked with the SASSA Legacy Information Management System (SOCOPEN) data three times a month, to remove recipients who have passed away.

In Turkey and Chile, CRVS and ID data are used to a lesser extent by extracting beneficiary information held in these databases to support the registration process. In fact, the ID is used as a unique identifier to integrate several other databases, drastically reducing the information needs at the time of registration.

4. The National Socio–Economic Registry

Pakistan’s flagship social protection programme BISP was rolled out as a premier social safety net programme by the Government of Pakistan in July 2008 with a view to supplementing income of the poorest of the poor. It is the largest and the most systematic unconditional cash transfer programme geared exclusively towards women. Its long-term objectives now cover meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of extreme and chronic poverty eradication and empowerment of women. In 2010, the BISP organised a nationwide survey to identify eligible households. The survey applied a proxy means test that determined the welfare status of households on a scale of 0-100. The database resulting from survey, titled National Socio–Economic Registry (NSER) covered more than 27 million households, which represented 87 percent of households in the country. In terms of coverage, the NSER has near universal coverage. It came about through en masse registration and as such falls into classification of census style static registries. The NSER has served to improve targeting and is being used by other social protection programmers. Like all static social registries, it represented a static snapshot of the data collected in 2010 and does not reflect the current socio–economic status of the household surveyed back in 2010.

In 2015, the BISP Board approved an update of the NSER. Since then, a new updated and refreshed NSER was completed at the end of 2021. After a thorough evaluation of different registration options, the BISP has settled on a combination of the door-to-door (D2D) approach used for the original NSER registration and an on-demand or self-registration approach consisting of temporary centers. The desk approach currently being employed does not exactly conform to the specificities of on-demand registration as it is administratively driven, and is time limited as opposed to conventional on-demand registration which is open throughout the year at designated offices where anybody can register any time. Going forward, many options are being mulled over as how to make the NSER more dynamic and up-to-date.

4.1 NSER and the journey towards dynamic social registry

This policy paper pulls together global practices and approaches to social registries in general and dynamic social registries in particular. Pakistan’s social registry generally called the NSER’s recent update has encompassed both census style sweep and desk registration approaches. In contrast to the previous static social registry approach, the new NSER update seeks to remain dynamic in coverage in the coming years and decades.
With the aim of keeping data current, more and more countries are incorporating some elements of on-demand or dynamic inclusion into the social registries to make data updating a continuing process in line with the changing vulnerability and poverty profiles of households.

### 4.2 Key policy recommendations going forward

#### 4.2.1 Updating NSER through periodic active outreach

Periodic active outreach routes to new intake, registration, and data updating are the best suited to countries with limited fiscal space to put in place permanent and well distributed on-demand registration structures. However, since the BISP programme has some presence in all parts of the country, the periodic outreach approach can be usefully and less expensively deployed. The BISP programme can open time-limited windows for new registrants in between countrywide surveys. In line with global practices, the programme can set up temporary desks to facilitate new intake and registration as has been employed in the second NSER survey. This periodic outreach can be more narrowly focused on the poorest and hard to reach areas. Similarly, the BISP offices can also be used to periodically update information held on current beneficiaries by asking them to come forward after a specified period.

#### 4.2.2 Data sharing legislation

Integration of existing government department databases is one of the least expensive and administratively most feasible ways to keep social registries dynamic and up to date. However, data sharing among different government entities requires legislative and policy framework. For harmonious and continuous data sharing among different government departments, legislation on data sharing is a pre-requisite. The Data Sharing Act, currently being developed, is a step in the right direction. This legislative measure would also complement the Ehsaas framework's wider and long-term ambition of bringing all programmes under one roof through a single window operation.

#### 4.2.3 Digitisation of government data

Government departments are in different phase of digitisation. Yet the pace of digitisation and the progress towards e-government is slow. Data stored by different government departments, if fully digitised, can offer greater opportunities for exchange and sharing and updating so-

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20 Interview with NSER cell team
cial registries. This has acquired new salience in view of all social assistance programmes being brought together and unified under the broader umbrella of the Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division (PASSD). The digitisation of data of all social assistance programmes and greater and continuous sharing of data across all government departments will go a long way in ensuring that social registries remain dynamic and up-to-date.

Existing administrative databases offer opportunities for making social registry dynamic and continuous to better reflect changing poverty and vulnerability dynamics of households. This data exchange and data integration is an easy and costless way to update existing information held on households. The BISP programme uses a unique Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) number which can be useful tool in integrating various CNIC-based identification systems.

The BISP has already made use of existing administrative data bases to weed out beneficiaries who are no longer eligible for Kafalat programme support. Yet for data integration of different administrative datasets to occur, data sharing and digitisation of the government data are a prerequisite.

4.2.5 Data protection

As NSER is the largest repository of data on households in Pakistan, protection and privacy of data must form one of the key measures in order to ensure public confidence in dynamic social registries. Social registries with a dynamic inclusion element built into them also have the additional obligation of ensuring that data protection and privacy measures are robust and that relevant legislation and policy framework to this effect are firmly in place.

Conclusion

As cash transfer programmes grow exponentially, the process of determining potential eligibility of beneficiaries through outreach, intake, registration, assessment of their needs and conditions is also gaining policy traction. The National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) established under the BISP unconditional cash transfer programme is one example of social registry which governs the registration and eligibility process. As shown above, dynamic social registries fulfil the purpose of realising universal social protection and the human rights agenda enshrined in the UN human rights principles and Sustainable Development Goals. Available literature on on-demand registration or dynamic registration identifies main approaches ranging from periodic outreach to permanent cash transfer programme offices to municipal offices. The BISP programme can begin its journey towards dynamic social registry through periodic active outreach campaigns coupled with digitisation of different government agencies and integration of administrative data bases.