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Célia Bouchet, Nicolas Duvoux. Post-COVID-19 poverty in France: magnitude, manifestations, and actors from nine case studies. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 2023, 43 (9-10), pp.823-837. <10.1108/IJSSP-07-2022-0182>. <hal-03852401>

**HAL Id: hal-03852401**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03852401v1>**

Submitted on 15 Nov 2022

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## **Post-COVID-19 poverty in France: magnitude, manifestations, and actors from nine case studies**

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**In:** *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*

**DOI :** 10.1108/IJSSP-07-2022-0182

### **Abstract:**

- **Purpose:** Drawing on the French case, this article examines the size and scope of poverty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the diversity of its manifestations, and the role of public action (among other actors) in addressing it. This reflection unfolds at the confluence between the international literature on the economic effects of COVID-19 around the world and the methodological and conceptual issues on poverty.
- **Approach:** Following a research report to the French government in 2021, a new academic collaboration is initiated to assess the conceptual issues underlying its nine quantitative, qualitative and participatory studies. A thematic analysis is used to elaborate on an original framework.
- **Findings:** COVID-19 not only had detrimental economic effects on specific groups, such as precarious workers and students but also serious effects on social isolation, mental health, access to welfare and public services. Together with assessing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty in France, this paper highlights the lack of recognition of community support in the face of hard times.
- **Originality:** The COVID-19 outbreak has not only deteriorated socioeconomic situations in France, but it has also unmasked structural, long-term components of poverty. The paper discusses three policy implications of these revelations, concerning a) the monitoring of non-monetary dimensions of poverty, b) the needs of various groups under a welfare state with a dual structure, and c) the role of communities in public policy schemes.

**Keywords:** Pandemic; Coronavirus (COVID-19); Social Welfare; Social Policy; France; Poverty; Inequality; Youth; Community; Not-for-profits; Housing; Employment.

In comparison to the World Bank's pre-COVID-19 projections, between 75 and 95 million more people worldwide could be living on less than \$1.90 a day by 2022 (Mahler et al., 2022). For the past two years, there has been increasing evidence that the outbreak has placed an economic and social burden on individuals, in addition to its health consequences (Brum & De Rosa, 2021; Buheji et al., 2020; Han, Meyer, & Sullivan, 2020; Simon & Khambule, 2021; Siza, 2020). Yet, the size, scope, and variety of COVID-19 effects on poverty and inequality are not entirely clear. France provides an interesting case to study this phenomenon: while national policy includes certain welfare provisions, the dualized welfare state has shown to be replicating, instead of correcting, structural inequalities between the recipients of insurance and social assistance schemes (Palier, 2010).

Drawing on a thematic analysis of nine case studies, we conceptualize three dimensions of COVID-19 effects (Swedberg, 2014): its monetary and non-monetary manifestations, the extent of poverty and the groups it affects, the role of public policies and non-state actors that take over. These three dimensions inform three questions. Our first research question is about the variety of poverty dimensions resulting from the pandemic: which aspects do income poverty capture, and what are the other dimensions at play? Our second one is about size and scope of the COVID-19 effects on poverty: for different groups, did it have an effect at all, has it caused a “new” poverty, strengthened an existing form of poverty, or simply revealed preexisting forms of inequality and deprivation? Our third one comes to the effects of the French welfare state, before and after the crisis: how has poverty been affected by public action (including both its redistribution programs and its top-down organization), and which other actors have taken over?

Our material is a collection of quantitative and qualitative studies conducted and assembled in 2020 by the National Council on Policies Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Conseil National des Politiques de Lutte Contre la Pauvreté et l'Exclusion Sociale (CNLE)). Our research perspective combines several influences, which we introduce in the literature section: economic assessments of policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic around the world and in France, and conceptual and methodological debates on poverty. After a synthetic presentation of the nine studies that we put into dialogue, we conceptualize the dimensions of poverty that can be considered as direct or indirect consequences of COVID-19. We show that the outbreak has triggered both income poverty and other forms of deprivation and exclusion. Depending on groups, the respective size and prominence of each aspect differs. While for some groups (and some only) public policies have mitigated the economic effects of the crisis, other actors, such as communities, have been a critical buffer on several levels. Drawing on these results, we question long-term policy implications in terms of acknowledging the multifaceted nature of poverty, addressing poverty over the long term (by paying attention to the dual structure of the welfare state) and shifting top-down actions towards a better recognition of poor people and their communities.

## **Literature**

### *Public policies and the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19*

In the international literature, the economic responses of public policy to the COVID-19 outbreak have been widely discussed. First, a number of studies have evaluated the effects of crisis management programs on the economies of different countries. They have provided both

comparative perspectives (Brodeur, Gray, Islam, & Bhuiyan, 2021; Tomala, Prokop, & Kordonska, 2022) and valuable case studies, focusing on topics such as employment stabilization policies in China (Zhang, 2022) or cash transfer policies in Uruguay (Brum & De Rosa, 2021). A second set of studies has interpreted states' emergency responses through the lens of their long-term political-economic orientations. This research has produced analyses in terms of “workfare” (McGann, Murphy, & Whelan, 2020), “emergency Keynesianism” (Aidukaite, Saxonberg, Szelewa, & Szikra, 2021), and “conditional neoliberalism” (Benoît & Hay, 2022).

Some of these works have specifically documented the economic management of the crisis in France. The country has been credited for implementing emergency welfare provisions, exemplified by the slogan “whatever it takes” (Cho, Jérôme, & Maurice, 2021). However, France also stood out for using a top-down decision-making process, reflective of a highly hierarchical governance system (Kuhlmann, Hellström, Ramberg, & Reiter, 2021). This mode of action stands in tension with France’s libertarian claims as a democratic state (Benoît & Hay, 2022). Moreover, ethno-racial disparities are less visible in the context in comparison to other countries where these categorical inequalities are recognized and the minority members’ sense of belonging recorded, through census or surveys (Finch, 2020).

The effectiveness of the French policy approach in terms of containing poverty throughout the crisis remains ambiguous. Early results suggest that French people were less affected by COVID-19-induced income poverty than their European neighbors (Menta, 2021). Indeed, income poverty rate remained stable between 2019 and 2020, at around 14.5% (within 0.1 percentage points); and the main indicators of inequality in living standards (Gini index, D9/D1 interdecile ratio, S80/S20 ratio) decreased slightly from 2019 to 2020 (Garnero & Guillaneuf, 2022). These observations, however, were challenged both by reports from non-profit associations and by a number of studies. Indeed, *ad hoc* surveys conducted throughout the crisis have found significant socioeconomic inequalities between groups. Low-income households, women, and young people have specifically suffered from decreased resources following the loss of a job or the reduction of their economic activity (Barhoumi et al., 2020; Givord & Silhol, 2020; Lambert et al., 2020). These groups also experienced more adverse living conditions, such as being confined to small spaces (Barhoumi et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2020) and/or having an increased domestic workload (Barhoumi et al., 2020; Recchi et al., 2020). Finally, looking at subjective indicators, it appears that individuals facing financial hardship, women, young people, and foreign-born residents experienced a greater emotional burden and deterioration of their well-being than the rest of the population (*ibid*).

#### *Assessing poverty: gaps in public statistics*

The results presented in the previous section are largely based on measures of income poverty. This indicator is valuable, as it allows for cross-country comparison and provides key elements on the economic well-being of the global population. Yet, the discrepancy between France's apparent success in curbing income poverty and the socioeconomic distress captured by other sources raises a general question about whether the current approach is sufficient to operationalize a comprehensive definition of poverty. Taking advantage of our position at the crossroads of academia and public policy (see Methodology), we build on existing research to list several shortcomings of available indicators and measures, on methodological and conceptual levels.

First, the timing of statistical production implies inertia. The National Statistical Institute only provided a first estimate of the 2020 poverty rate in November 2021 and will update it in the fall of 2022 (once the distribution of the standard of living in 2020 is available). These statistics are designed to monitor poverty and inform long-term public action, for example in evaluating five-year poverty reduction targets (Damon, 2012).<sup>11</sup> However, in the case of an emergency schedule aimed at addressing a crisis like COVID-19, this timeline does not work.

Second, the exclusive reliance of public statistics on “income poverty” creates several problems. This indicator is based on a standard of living threshold (in France, set at 60% of the median standard of living), which supposedly reflects the insufficiency of a household's economic resources. Since the end of the 1990s, this measure has been controversial, even among statisticians and administrators (Fleurbaey, Herpin, Martinez, & Verger, 1998; Lollivier & Verger, 1998). Is it, then, appropriate to set a relative threshold rather than an absolute level? Can we rely on a single indicator? While, of course, these questions have strong conceptual implications, they also have practical consequences. As shown by these works and others (Verger, 2005), the size and scope of the segment of the population considered poor varies substantially depending on the use of a standard of living threshold, a living condition score, or self-reports of economic difficulties. There is only a 60% overlap between poverty living conditions and monetary poverty (Blasco & Gleizes, 2019). Subjective poverty measures also show that the overlap of perceived poverty and monetary poverty are, at best, partial (Duvoux & Papuchon, 2018). While the public policy agenda has been shifting away from social exclusion, the scientific debates raised about this issue in the 1990's at the European level (Room, 1995) still nourish various attempts to distinguish dimensions of poverty and measures of their diffusion.

A third pitfall of national statistics is that they usually rely on household surveys, such as the Survey on Fiscal and Social Income (Enquête sur les Revenus Fiscaux et Sociaux) and the Statistics on Resources and Living Conditions survey (Statistiques sur les Ressources et Conditions de Vie (SRCV)). As a result, these statistics do not capture groups that are overexposed to poverty, such as people living on the street, in emergency shelters, in retirement facilities, in institutions for people with disabilities, in student residences, *etc.* They also fail to account for undocumented migrants as they are not recorded in the sampling frame. Other data sources that do cover these groups, such as outreach approaches, have yet to be considered.

Finally, it appears that the institutional emphasis on income poverty over other indicators spreads a certain view of poverty. This perspective is questionable. A top-down definition of poverty has material consequences in terms of framing public policies and their target groups and programs. Historically, the alternative standpoint of non-profit associations has often played a key role in pushing the state agenda (Brodiez-Dolino, 2013; Viguier, 2020). There are also epistemological and normative stakes. The institutional point of view only gives access to a certain type of knowledge, while it is increasingly valued to take the first-hand knowledge of the people concerned into account. These aspects contributed to the emergence and rapid development of Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) from the 1990s onwards, initially at the World Bank and then at other organizations. As stated in one of the World Bank's first reports on the subject, PPAs are motivated by both the objective of “understanding hidden dimensions of poverty and analyzing causality and processes by which people fall into and get out of poverty” (Robb, 1999, p. 5) and “the moral

imperative for giving the poor a voice in the poverty debate” (*ibid*, p.66). Beyond PPAs, participatory approaches to poverty have gained lasting popularity, as exemplified by the international study *Hidden Dimensions of Poverty*, recently co-piloted by the University of Oxford and ATD Fourth World (Bray, de Laat, Godinot, Ugarteg, & Walker, 2020). In contrast, national institutions have rarely engaged in participatory approaches to poverty.

### **Methodology: A secondary analysis of nine case studies**

This paper extends a mixed methods project on COVID-19 poverty in France, conducted by a national advisory board. Beyond the descriptive ambition of the initial project, we intend to develop theoretical arguments, raise methodological issues, and discuss policy implications. To do so, we perform a secondary analysis of the nine studies involved in the project. The resulting themes echo and add to the available research on COVID-19, poverty, and public policies around the world.

#### *Context of the initial project*

In January 2021, the French Prime Minister Jean Castex commissioned a scientific report on COVID-19-related poverty that would complement existing quantifications with qualitative approaches. For this task, he mandated the establishment of the National Council on Policies Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Conseil National des Politiques de Lutte Contre la Pauvreté et l'Exclusion Sociale (CNLE)), an advisory body with a scientific committee and a committee of persons concerned by poverty. To complete the mandate, the CNLE relied on nine original studies, that encompasses a wide range of research methods: four statistical analyses of various sources, two studies based mainly on archives and documentary sources from associations or local authorities, a qualitative analysis of a large corpus of telephone calls, a literature review, and personal accounts collected from the committee of persons concerned. Details about the methods and scope of each study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 approximately here

#### *Strengths and limitations*

We can highlight the strengths and limitations of the nine studies. They are large-scale and utilized various quantitative and qualitative approaches so that they can shed light on the topic from different angles, providing unique value. The participatory approach has allowed for capturing the standpoint of welfare recipients and poor people and integrating it as a contribution to the studies. This rich data allows to address various dimensions of poverty, including income and material deprivation but also suffering and social relationships, as well as institutional (lack of) support. A last major interest of the studies is to provide information on populations that are not or only poorly covered by these statistics: the self-employed, students, and undocumented migrants.

Regarding limitations and weaknesses, two aspects can be mentioned. The first is the way the context framed the selection of the case studies. As they were initially aimed at providing the authorities with information on a current situation, they did not rely on integrated research design that could provide a representative overview of the ongoing surveys. Moreover, the circumstances themselves limited research opportunities: the national quantitative studies were not designed to

capture such an event as the pandemic, and the qualitative studies had to adapt to circumstances, specifically, the first lockdown that limited the possibilities to gather data.

### *Interest and relevance of the corpus*

The nine studies collected by the CNLE as part of the project provide an interesting corpus for poverty analysis. Although these studies are not *exhaustive* of French research on the subject, they are *contrasted* enough to reflect its diversity. Indeed, they cover a variety of methods and epistemologies: quantitative and qualitative studies, classical research formats and a participatory approach.

First, the combination of methods allows for common survey variables (such as income poverty and standard of living) being put into perspective using other markers that we identify inductively from openly expressed experiences. A Q-Squared approach is also valuable for diversifying the perspectives and scales of analysis from the standpoints of poor people to inform the insights of associations and local authorities, as well as institutional definitions of poverty. The confrontation of drastically different conceptions poses challenges but is ultimately a source of knowledge (Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; Thomas, 2008). Third, qualitative studies on specific groups (people received by associations, young people, etc.) and statistics representing a restricted scope (people living in households) complement each other advantageously. Finally, longitudinal statistics provide historical background and context on poverty dynamics, which help interpret the structural and circumstantial dimensions in the qualitative results regarding the COVID-19 pandemic period.

The CNLE also provides a unique setting in which poor people share their experiences on a regular basis in a dedicated committee that operates as a focus group. Confronting this first-hand knowledge with more conventional academic research offer unique insights, as already demonstrated by ATD and Oxford's study.

### *From description to conceptualization*

When commissioned by the Ministry, the CNLE juxtaposed nine studies without exploring the cross-cutting issues among them, nor engaging with the existing literature. There are many reasons for this. First, it was an administrative body, invested with a mission of description rather than conceptualization. In addition, the CNLE had a very limited amount of time: the final report was delivered four months after the mandate, in May 2021 (Duvoux & Lelièvre, 2021).

While this format was appropriate for delivery to the Minister, it did not achieve the full scientific potential of the nine studies. Sharing this observation, the two of us, a full-time academic researcher who had not been involved in the project until then and a part-time public officer who had been a driving force behind it, combined our backgrounds—fresh eyes and experience—to reanalyze the corpus. Our research perspective was to review the nine studies to examine the poverty/COVID-19 nexus based on the French case. We adopted a secondary analysis approach over a systematic review, following a common design of mixed methods research: linking at the data analysis stage qualitative and quantitative surveys that have previously been conducted in parallel. Sometimes called "concurrent design" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) or "coordinated design" (Greene, Benjamin, & Goodyear, 2011) in the mixed methods literature, this protocol makes inferences from

the quantitative and qualitative materials only after the research is completed, like a meta-analysis. This procedure is useful to take advantage of the complementary contributions of quantitative and qualitative studies from a collective project (Aguilera & Chevalier, 2021).

The thematic analysis of the nine studies identified three dimensions of COVID-19 poverty: 1) the various manifestations of poverty fueled by the pandemic; 2) the contrasting profiles of the people who have been affected and 3) the buffer created by certain ties of communal solidarity. Each axis responds primarily to one of our research questions, addressing respectively the diversity of forms of poverty following the outbreak (question 1), the scope of people affected (question 2) and buffers to the shortcomings of public action (question 3). More transversally, as we will emphasize throughout the text, all the themes are also influenced in some ways by public policies and/or their gaps (question 3).

## **Results**

### *COVID-19 as an economic and social crisis*

Even though the income poverty rate seems to have remained stable in France in 2020, the nine studies display many other signs of an abrupt deterioration of economic and social situations following the outbreak of COVID-19. This crisis is reflected in various economic indicators, as well as in a wide range of other hardships.

Every study in the report finds some financial impact of the crisis in one form or another. Based on statistics from the Ministry of Solidarities and Health (Ministère des solidarités et de la santé), Michèle Lelièvre notes a sharp increase in the number of people receiving minimum-level social benefits in spring 2020, during the first wave of the outbreak. Both public statistics and the Coconel survey (discussed by Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière) also find drops in income during this period, related to temporary or permanent job loss. As Pierre Blavier reminds us, even apart from the circumstances of COVID-19, becoming unemployed is a major trigger for entering poverty. Muriel Pucci's simulations show that losing one's job due to the outbreak is likely to have the same consequences. People who lose their job are at a high risk of falling from the low-income group into poverty or from poverty into extreme poverty, unlike those only partially unemployed (through an emergency government measure that allowed eligible employees to keep their jobs while receiving about three quarters of their net wages).

Several qualitative studies also identify manifestations of economic poverty that escape statistical surveys. Citing association records, Axelle Brodriez-Dolino describes food and hygiene assistance as a barometer: the sudden increase in demand during the first two waves of the outbreak signaled peaks in deprivation. From another standpoint, the focus group of persons concerned provides a graphic account of the budgetary pressure on their households: increases in the prices of essential products and decreases in income that restrain consumption (“It is difficult to have healthy food when everything is emptied and incomes are low”<sup>1</sup>), confinement to overcrowded housing (“With two daughters, I sleep in the living room, it's unbearable, I can't take it anymore”), failures of social services that undermine confidence in the institutions (“Family allowance payments were blocked

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<sup>1</sup> Originally in French. All translations are our own.

for three months, even though the regularization was done five months later. It is too late and for me; it is a form of institutional violence.”).

But across these studies, other forms of burdens also emerged. The Coconel survey, for example, captures feelings of isolation, difficulty in living through certain periods of the day, increased domestic workloads for women (Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière). However, the extent of these problems is mainly revealed by qualitative sources. Associations document an accumulation of intra-family tensions and even physical violence (Axelle Brodiez-Dolino). The focus group of persons concerned also portrays significant discouragement (“It's really hard to live month by month without knowing the income we will have later.”), feelings of anguish that hinder access to social rights (“Some parents of single-parent families say they don't have the right to get sick... they say to me: ‘How do I feed my children if I'm sick?’ I'd rather not know,”), very serious mental health issues (“Suicide attempts; I went through that less than a year ago. I have no life at all. I have friends who have no life either. My family is 300 miles away and I can't see them.”).

These results recall that poverty is multidimensional, encompassing economic situations as well as degraded living conditions. These aspects are distinct but interconnected. Poor people tend to have living conditions that impede physical distancing. They are prone to have health conditions that exposed them to the worst effects of the disease (diabetes and obesity for instance). They face social isolation and lack of family support, which proved to be key resources to avoid mental health issues. Specific examples related to the various groups exposed to poverty during the COVID-19 crisis will display the importance to take all of these dimensions of poverty into account.

#### *Composite groups of poor people facing COVID-19*

The COVID-19 crisis partly recomposes exposure to poverty. Building on the different studies, we distinguish between five groups, depending on how long they have been experiencing poverty and the impact of COVID-19 (Table 2).

Table 2 approximately here

The first group is composed of people who have been poor for a long time, and for whom transfer payments ensure relative stability. They are typically recipients of minimum-level social benefits or retired, often French nationals (Axelle Brodiez-Dolino). This group illustrates the importance of a multicriteria definition of poverty. From an income standpoint, all recipients' situation remained the same. Yet, as Baronnet and Vanoni compellingly showed, their experiences were very contrasted. While some of them faced the heaviest burden in social isolation and lack of contacts with institutions, others experienced a relief, as they were less stigmatized for not been able to participate fully in social life: “For once, lockdowns made me feel like anyone else.” The sole study of the monetary impacts of the crisis cannot fully document these dimensions related to social capital and recognition.

The second group consists of other people who were already poor, but for whom the situation worsens due to COVID-19. Associations find that people who are severely deprived, for example homeless, in emergency accommodation or in shanty towns, are on the front line (Axelle Brodiez-Dolino). In addition to people without secure housing, the Coconel survey identifies some

individuals affected by inadequate housing, like sub-standard and cramped accommodations (Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière), representing about 5% of all households.

The studies also point to a third group: people who were on the edge of poverty and who are pushed into it by COVID-19. This shift occurs notably among low-income employees, precarious workers (e.g., temporary workers or self-employed people), undocumented migrants, and single mothers, as unanimously reported by the Coconel survey (Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière), associations (Axelle Brodriez-Dolino), and social workers (Juliette Baronnet and Didier Vanoni).

The fourth group features “new publics” of poverty that are rather surprising to associations and social workers, such as middle-class entrepreneurs and students. New situations of poverty may also arise a result of family breakdowns or in circumstances of conflictual cohabitation (e.g., in certain cases of forced family reunions). The report goes into particular detail regarding the structural causes of young people's transition into poverty. In a review of the literature, Tom Chevalier, Patricia Loncle, and Camille Peugny highlight a generational inequality that predates the pandemic: the threefold increase in precarious employment since the 1980s, the decline in the average age of access to a first permanent job, and snowball effects of delayed access to housing, living with a partner, and having children. The COVID-19 pandemic, thus, acted as a catalyst for precariousness. Besides the decrease in resources, a number of young people also suffer from the policy response to the crisis in terms of secondary and higher education moving online. The introduction of distance learning carries both risks of school dropout and degraded learning, especially for students with limited resources (sharing of workspaces and computers, poor Internet connection, *etc.*)

Groups 3 and 4, that is, people who enter poverty at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, include many individuals who have no social rights, such as young people under the age of 25 (the age limit in France for receiving minimum-level social benefits) or migrants without a legal status. Besides, as social workers note, even among legally entitled individuals, many are very unaware of their rights since they have never used them before (Juliette Baronnet and Didier Vanoni).

Finally, within the fifth group, stable wage earners have been protected from the economic effects of the pandemic and lockdowns. Furthermore, in sharp contrast to these four shades of poverty, the richest households have emerged even richer from the crisis. Wealth, which is a key dimension of contemporary inequality (Piketty, 2014) has been accumulated by the top quintile of the income distribution, strengthening preexisting disparities and the cumulative aspect of advantage, as well as disadvantage. In the bitter words of one association, the crisis acts as a “magnifying mirror of social inequalities [...]; it tends to increase inequalities that predated it<sup>2</sup>” (Axelle Brodriez-Dolino). This, in turn, gives rise to a social malaise that finds a political expression in the focus group of persons concerned: “There is a major social divide. The haves are the winners. The poor, it reminds us of the Middle Ages.”

#### *Community solidarity as a (frail) buffer*

All of the studies in the report refer to the contribution of communities (families, neighbors, friends, etc.) in the face of the inequalities that the outbreak of COVID-19 has generated or exacerbated.

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<sup>2</sup> Restos du cœur, "Flash study on the effects of the health crisis (COVID-19) on the audiences received by Restos du cœur, February 2021.

Proximity networks sometimes add to the problem: in addition to intra-family tensions, already mentioned above, the focus group of persons concerned refers to frictions with the neighborhood (“I was insulted, people tried to enter my house, I ended up filing a complaint.”). However, overall, the studies highlight the major role of community solidarity as a buffer to the shortcomings of governmental arrangements. This support can be monetary or material, as well as human assistance.

On the economic level, first, community bonds are protective. According to Muriel Pucci's simulations, couples are less exposed to income poverty during the COVID-19 crisis than single parents and one-person households, especially for people under 25 years old. In real life conditions, the Coconel survey also shows that, among modest households, those with stable conjugal and family situations have better living conditions than those without them (Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière). These results are consistent with the high proportion of isolated youth and single parents that the associations receive (Axelle Brodiez-Dolino). Yet, for young people, family support represents no panacea. As Tom Chevalier, Patricia Loncle, and Camille Peugny recall, material security often comes at the cost of postponing one's transition to adulthood (financial self-reliance and independent housing).

Human assistance is another important form of solidarity, especially for isolated or elderly people. Jean-François Laé's research in the Socially Disadvantaged Department of Seine Saint-Denis documents this aspect in detail. Women's involvement with members of their family, particularly with their elderly parents, is salient from the telephone conversations. Regarded as "pillars of the family," women come to replace the professional caregivers that were kept away by the crisis or initiate recourse to social rights for their parents. Neighbors and friends complete this action by running errands or taking news on a daily basis. However, community solidarity can be exhausted over time, especially if the care work becomes long-term without being properly recognized.

## **Discussion**

The secondary analysis of the nine studies from the CNLE report informs several facets of the COVID-19/poverty nexus in the French context. After summarizing these results, we will discuss their implications for public policies.

### *Summary*

Our thematic analysis informs three dimensions of COVID-19 poverty: its manifestations, its size and scope, and its (public and non-public) actors

First, the manifestations of such poverty are multiform as soon as we go beyond the indicator of income poverty to consider the use of minimum-level social benefits, the recourse to food aid, or the feeling of discouragement given an uncertain future. Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and budgetary dimensions of poverty largely overlap with other alterations in a person's life situation (e.g., family tension and violence, discouragement, and anxiety). In other words, a whole range of findings point to a type of poverty that goes beyond the ordinary understanding of the concept.

Second, drawing on this multidimensional view of poverty, there is clear evidence that the crisis has acted as a poverty trigger for several groups. Drawing on associations' reports, Axelle Brodiez-

Dolino has shown that if new publics emerged, among which the self-employed and students were the most visible, this newness had to be nuanced. The people concerned were already on the verge of falling into poverty and already helped by various social actors, sometimes public, at other times nonprofits. Several groups are particularly affected by the COVID-19 context, whether they have been on the front lines because of their long-standing deprivation (e.g., people living on the street or those who are poorly housed) or whether their situation has worsened with the outbreak (e.g., precarious workers, undocumented immigrants, single mothers, and youth). This result confirms those of other studies conducted around the world on the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on young adults (Lewis, 2022), women refugees (Golesorkhi, Fortson, Harder, & Riedmann, 2022), undocumented men (Borjas & Cassidy, 2020), Black, Brown, and indigenous populations, as well as inhabitants from the northern and northeastern regions of Brazil (Tavares & Betti, 2021). As a further contribution, because of its dual welfare state, the French case reveals that groups at the margins of insurance-based systems are particularly penalized financially, having to rely on food banks and nonprofits.

Third, we have shown that the trajectories of these group's members, as well as the ones of other citizens, interact with institutions. Stable workers' income preservation has been considered a primary target whereas the groups on the fringes of the labor market have been much less protected. These latter have faced the most severe economic losses. For welfare recipients, income stability has gone hand in hand with a sharp degradation of living-conditions. For even less protected citizens, non-profits have been the sole institutional buffer available. We underline that community organizations played a great role, even if it has not been recognized as such.

### *Policy implications*

Our results have deep implications for public policies. They highlight three issues that have been emphasized by the COVID-19 crisis: the statistical and political importance of a multidimensional approach to poverty, the existence of latent, long-standing socioeconomic vulnerabilities fueled by the dual welfare state, and the French bias towards under-recognition of the supportive role of communities in response to adverse events.

A first lesson from the COVID-19 crisis regarding poverty stems from the fact that exceptional circumstances have motivated exceptional research. The studies in the CNLE's report capture indicators and populations that generally escape public statistics. They reveal, by contrast, the weaknesses of conventional measures: their one-dimensional conception of poverty, their overlook of bottom-up views, and their failure to account for some of the poorest groups in society. This challenge to institutional statistics is constructive, offering long-term insights to improve poverty monitoring processes. The measurement of poverty using multiple indicators, already popular in heterodox economics (see the pioneering work of Alkire and Foster (2011)), can be further enriched, e.g., qualitative research involving poor populations helps to identify avatars of poverty inductively. The combination of studies based on different methods is also a great asset for crossing standpoints and scales. Finally, qualitative investigations (including outreach approaches) and local surveys provide valuable information on situations that are not represented by "representative" public statistics or that are represented too late to guide public action effectively.

Secondly, mobilizing several time scales, we characterize poverty as triggered or amplified rather than created by the outbreak. Even the so-called new forms of poverty are part of long-term dynamics of inequality, including the gradual casualization of the labor market and the accentuation of social cleavages in France since the 1980s and a fortiori following the 2008 crisis (Bernard, Caurier, Ananian, & Chamkhi, 2018; Jany-Catrice & Lallement, 2012). For contextualization, Anne Lambert and Joanie Cayouette-Remblière enumerate the forms of precariousness that have developed since the 2000s: the spread of atypical forms of employment, the increase in income and wealth inequalities, the rise in socio-residential segregation, the increased difficulties younger generations face in the housing and employment markets, etc. The authors consider that they have prefigured inequalities at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak. Knowing this long-term evolution is also important for understanding the resentment towards public institutions and socioeconomic elites among the people concerned. Enduring economic hardship has fueled a sense of injustice, which, even before the crisis, was expressed in the Yellow Vest movement (Grossman, 2019; Jetten, Mols, & Selvanathan, 2020). We believe that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this revolt was combined with the distrust in political institutions that has been rising in France since the 2000s (Perrineau, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008). This background fosters the criticism of the focus group of people concerned, as well as the more general distrust detected by the CNLE's new Qualitative Monitoring Barometer of Poverty and Social Exclusion (Baromètre de Suivi Qualitatif de la Pauvreté et l'Exclusion Sociale) among poor people in France (Lazaar & Duvoux, 2022). Without questioning the essential nature of emergency measures in the face of COVID-19, this body of evidence calls for a reinforcement of long-term social policies, notably to support populations that are currently left behind by the dual structure of the welfare state.

The third and final implication relates to the importance of community support in addressing hardships as both a complement and supplement to public policies. Both the exceptional program of partial unemployment and the historic policies of minimum-level social benefits have served as an essential safety net for the French population. But they were far from sufficient. While associations partly took over, community solidarity built on family, neighbor, and friend networks was the primary buffer. At first glance, this finding may not seem very revealing. The social sciences have long documented the role of community ties in providing various kinds of support (Cattell, 2001; Wellman & Wortley, 1990), and recent studies conducted worldwide have shown that these relationships were indeed activated in response to COVID-19 (Hussein, 2022; Igwe et al., 2020). However, in the French context, exposing this dimension in a report to the government is close to a revelation. For decades, French politicians have ostensibly condemned “communautarism,” which they frame as a noxious separateness (Mohammed & Talpin, 2018; Montague, 2013). Presenting communities as a source of support in the face of adversity upsets this dominant narrative. By extension, the visibilization of strong yet little-recognized solidarity raises the question of how to better compensate for the support that is provided by them on a long-term basis (e.g., informal assistance provided to one’s aging parents). This perspective would treat communities as allies in the fight against poverty as opposed to an overly top-down approach.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis of the COVID-19/poverty nexus in the French economic, social, and political context shed light on three topics: the monetary and non-monetary components of COVID-19 poverty; the

unequal exposure of various groups; and supportive effects of community solidarity in a country that continues to under-recognize it.

This article paves the way for further work on COVID-19 poverty in France, which will confirm or refine our results by triangulating the heterogeneous sources we use here. We also offer inspiration for similar studies in other countries. Last, our findings provide lasting takeaways for public policy. Specifically, we identify several avenues for better information and action: a) by proposing a protocol to complete and enrich public statistics on poverty; by calling for supplementing emergency measures with long-term policies towards populations poorly covered by the insurance system; and by recalling the role of multiple actors in addressing situations of poverty. This diversity of stakeholders calls for a shift from the French top-down approach to a dialogue between the state (and its agents), associations, communities, and the people themselves, from the conception to the implementation and reception of anti-poverty policies.

If our research can, therefore, serve public action, conversely, the governmental mandate to the CNLE, provided both the occasion and the means to structure a broader and finer-grained tool for poverty monitoring and enriched the scope and the dimensions of poverty studied at the national level. From this standpoint, the COVID-19 pandemic and its management by public authorities has been an opportunity to enhance the production of poverty-related analysis.

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Table 1: Presentation of the nine studies

Authors	Number	Aim	Methods	Data
Axelle Brodiez-Dolino	1	Assessing whether COVID-19 has created “new” poor	Written sources (Records)	Activity reports and internal surveys from 6 major French associations; Spring 2020 – Winter 2021
Pierre Blavier	2	Measuring the determinants of entry into poverty	Quantitative	EU-SILC survey (data on France) 2005-2019
Jean-François Laé	3	Analyzing community solidarity during the pandemic	Ethnography	Telephone calls from a departmental emergency platform created during the first lockdown in spring 2020
Anne Lambert, Joanie Cayouette-Remblière	4	Analyzing inequalities of exposure to various dimensions of COVID-19 & lockdowns	Quantitative	Coconel - Housing and Living Conditions; May 2020
Didier Vanoni and Juliette Baronnet	5	Describing the multiple dimensions of support provided by local institutions	Qualitative	Observations and interviews with social workers and local institution staff; Spring 2020- Winter 2021
Muriel Pucci	6	Anticipating the effects of the economic downturn on households in light of the legislation	Quantitative	Social legislation and economic forecast based on the April 2020 social benefit scales

Michèle Lelièvre	7	Anticipating the effects of the economic downturn on households according to available national statistics	Literature review	Publications of the National Statistical Institute from Spring 2020 to Winter 2021
Tom Chevalier, Camille Peugny, Patricia Loncle	8	Analyzing the effects of the pandemic and lockdown on youth	Literature review	Overview of available resources and institution-centered analysis covering the 1980-2021 period
Poor people from CNLE's committee of persons concerned	9	Assessment of their lived experiences of the pandemic	Focus group	3 hours of recorded collective interviews; Spring 2020-Winter 2021

Table 2: Five patterns of exposure to COVID-19 poverty

Dimensions	<i>Economic losses</i>	<i>Other dimensions (social isolation; effects of degraded housing conditions)</i>	<i>Degree and forms of institutional support</i>
Groups			
<b>1- Welfare recipients</b>	- Protection by the welfare state from income losses	++ Non-monetary poverty strengthened	Weak to moderate Outreach displayed by local authorities
<b>2- Undocumented workers / invisible populations</b>	+ Informal work interrupted	+ Lack of relief and institutional support	Inexistent to weak Non-profits as main actors
<b>3- Populations already on edge (low-income employees, precarious workers, single mothers)</b>	+ No or insufficient protection by the welfare state	+ Low experience of institutional support	Weak State and Nonprofits
<b>4- Fringes of the labor force (students; self-employed; fixed-term and part-time workers)</b>	+ Monetary poverty strengthened	++ Conflictual cohabitations Low experience of institutional support	Weak State and Nonprofits
<b>5- Stable wage-earners</b>	- Protection by the welfare state	+ 	Strong ("Whatever it takes" policy)