

# No welfare without workfare? Revisiting varieties of minimum income schemes in Europe (2008–2022)

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## Abstract

The social policy literature indicates a notable shift towards activation in minimum income schemes (MIS) since the 1990s, which has led to the emergence of new policy varieties. However, previous research has failed to reveal institutional changes over time and across/within varieties. This article measures and interprets varieties of minimum income across six welfare states from 2008 to 2022. It examines the evolution of varieties of MIS over time, and the extent to which changes have been driven by path dependence dynamics or by convergence towards a workfare model. Theoretically, the article builds on the regulation approach in political economy. Methodologically, it applies a Principal Component Analysis to a new dataset that consists of three OECD-standard indicators alongside two novel indicators formulated for this study. The findings illustrate that varieties of MIS have undergone both quantitative and qualitative changes, moving within and between typologies. These changes are attributed to a lack of investment in income protection, limited enabling opportunities, and the introduction of specific, incremental workfare reforms.

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## KEYWORDS

active inclusion, minimum income schemes, principal component analysis, welfare state change, workfare

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The economic and social changes that occurred following the Great Recession and the pandemic have contributed to a groundswell of policy reforms in the domain of minimum income over the past two decades. In this vein, minimum income schemes (MIS) have intervened as ‘compensatory policies’ alongside unemployment benefits and family allowances (Ferragina, 2019; Hemerijck, 2017), aiming to guarantee a decent minimum standard of living for them and their dependents, regardless of their position within the labour market (Frazer & Marlier, 2016). Notwithstanding this primary objective, this policy domain has experienced retrenchment over the past few decades (Cantillon et al., 2015; Marx & Nelson, 2013). Concurrently, active labour market and family policies have been expanded in a ‘double movement’ where adequate safety nets have been reduced in favour of employment-oriented policies (Ferragina, 2019; Ferragina, 2022; Heins & Bennett, 2018).

Since the 1990s, the social policy literature has consistently demonstrated that the shift towards activation has been apparent not only in welfare policies overall but also within the domain of MIS, now characterised by stricter work conditionality (Lødemel and Trickey, 2001; Moreira, 2008; Marx & Nelson, 2013; Lødemel & Moreira, 2014). The importance of the activation component in this policy domain has led scholars to introduce this variable into the study of varieties of MIS (Clegg, 2013; Marchal and Van Mechelen, 2017; Natili, 2020), in contrast to early categorisations that focused on the generosity, expenditure and governance of such programmes (Lødemel & Schulte, 1992; Gough et al., 1997; Gough, 2001; Hölsch & Kraus, 2004, 2006). The increased link between social rights and obligations in social policy-making has led one strand of the literature to suggest that the Keynesian welfare state (KWS) has been replaced by a Schumpeterian Workfare Regime (SWR). In this scenario, policy change would take place irrespective of the welfare state regime, becoming workfare ‘the institutional codification of work-oriented welfare reform’ (Peck, 2001; 342) in a process of ‘fast policy transfer’ (Peck, 2002). Yet, previous research has only provided a static picture of the status of MIS, failing to reveal changes over time and across/within varieties.

In this context, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of the following questions: Have varieties of minimum income changed between 2008 and 2022? To what extent are these changes driven by path dependence dynamics or by convergence towards a workfare model over other varieties?

This article addresses this gap by empirically tracing the trends in the evolution of varieties of MIS between 2008 and 2022 in six EU countries: Denmark, Germany, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Estonia. To do so, it adopts Natili’s (2020) proposed typology of worlds of minimum income (WoM) as a conceptual foundation for the analysis, which considers the multidimensional nature of MIS by integrating the three fundamental dimensions identified in the literature: protectiveness, enabling activation, and workfare activation. The imperative to incorporate a temporal lens stems from the critical role of the time horizon in comparative welfare state research, as they confront the frequent occurrence of shifts, which may vary in their magnitude and pace (Greve, 2019). ‘Trend’ is thus conceptualised to address both temporal developments and the component elements of MIS across different time periods (see Daly & Ferragina, 2018, in the context of family policy). Therefore, this article illustrates the importance of ‘multidimensional description’ to understand the relationship between varieties and time (Gerring, 2012), asserting that the (re)construction of varieties of MIS may enhance rigorous concept formation and measurement within this policy domain (Collier et al., 2012).

Methodologically, the article employs a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). This method has the potential to capture the multidimensional nature of varieties over time (Ferragina, 2022; Ferragina & Filetti, 2022), hence

facilitating the measurement of the clustering of WoM in 2008 and 2022. Moreover, it identifies hybrid cases and highlights which indicators have the largest impact on varieties' movements within this space, depicted as a biplot (Ferragina et al., 2013). The article draws on a novel comparative dataset of five indicators related to the dimensions of protectiveness, enabling activation, and workfare activation. It comprises a mixture of three OECD-standard indicators and two novel indicators formulated specifically for this study. 'Protectiveness' (1) is assessed by using income adequacy data from the OECD, following the prevalent approach of setting income protection relative to 60% of national median income (Cantillon et al., 2020). 'Enabling activation' (2) is measured through expenditure of 'training' and 'public employment services' (PES) from the OECD, alongside a novel and own elaborated indicator on benefit design. 'Workfare activation' (3) is measured following the same strategy on benefit design (e.g., see section 3.2 for details). These two innovative indicators contribute to the provision of new scores for enabling and workfare activation across the six countries for 2008 and 2022.

The findings suggest that WoM have undergone meaningful changes between and within typologies, with the presence of hybrid cases. These movements depend on the emphasis countries place on protectiveness, enabling, and workfare activation. The empirical analysis illustrates a notable workfare shift in three countries –Hungary, Germany and Denmark– which derive from (1) a stagnation in investment in income protection and enabling activation and (2) specific and gradual workfare reforms, such as the tightening the definition of adequate job offer or the strengthening of sanctions for non-compliance. Italy, despite following this shift, has nonetheless enhanced protectiveness and enabling activation over time. Estonia and Spain uphold relatively stable positions, as their gradual improvements in protectiveness have not been accompanied by efforts in the enabling dimension, and in the case of Estonia, neither with a reduction in conditionality. These results carry significant policy implications, as the growing use of workfare measures has been concurrently accompanied by limited efforts in income protection –with few exceptions– and a stagnation or reduction in enabling services. This scenario suggests a potential erosion of adequate safety nets within the contemporary European social model.

The article is organised as follows. First, it provides a literature review on the relationship between minimum income protection and the workfare shift, explaining how this nexus has shaped the different varieties. Then, it develops the theoretical section in which the potential implications of the transition from the KWS to the SWR for our policy domain are explained. This section informs the development of our guiding hypothesis. Third, it explains the empirical strategy to investigate change over time. It then moves on to discuss the results and its implications for welfare state research and the study of MIS in Europe.

## 2 | WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE NEXUS BETWEEN MINIMUM INCOME PROTECTION AND WORKFARE

The increased connection between minimum income protection and workfare dates to the 1990s, becoming entrenched in the early 2000s. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) advanced around 1990 the notion of "active society", concerning the need to ease access to work for all. The Lisbon agenda took this groundwork to promote a new social policy scenario in which engagement in paid work was seen as the key for social integration (León, 2009; Levitas, 1998). In the field of MIS, the emergence of this activation approach implied a general strengthening of the conditional ties and duties for beneficiaries, becoming social services and labour market programmes part of the 'minimum income package' during the 1990s (Lødemel and Trickey, 2001; Moreira, 2008). This shift from the sole protection of people from market risks through compensatory policies to their empowerment within the market has been defined as social investment turn (Ronchi, 2014: 461; Hemerijck, 2015, 2017).

By creating, mobilising or preserving skills, on the one hand, and by enhancing people's ability to work and to balance work and family life, on the other, social investment policies pretend to be 'preventive' rather than 'compensatory' (Bussemeyer et al., 2018). Nevertheless, one strand of literature posits that "being preventive" can manifest

through two avenues: workfare and enabling-oriented policies (Dingeldey, 2007; Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008; Larsen, 2005). This discourse has regarded workfare as a distinct form of activation, frequently juxtaposed with the ‘human capital’ or ‘enabling’ activation approach (Clasen & Mascaró, 2022). The first refers to mechanisms that bolster job search activities and the probability of accepting a job: time limits, restrictive definitions of suitable job offer, maximum number of job rejections and sanctions, among others. All these mechanisms intend “to shorten unemployment duration by making benefit receipt less attractive” (Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008: 11). On the contrary, enabling activation theoretically aims to improve the human capital of beneficiaries rather than inducing behavioural change. It does so through vocational training programmes, job placement, childcare and other long-term focused employment policies (Bonoli, 2011; Dingeldey, 2007; Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008; Larsen, 2005).

This activation shift in social policy has also impacted on MIS. In 2008, the European Commission (EC) launched a Policy Recommendation on Active Inclusion amidst the Great Recession, as a response to the changing nature of social problems and to the emergence of new social risks (Scalise, 2020). This movement endorsed the ‘activation framework’ for member states in this policy field: in addition to advocating for the improvement of income protection levels, the call aimed to strengthen labour market policies and access to quality services. Consequently, the notion of shifting “from safety net to trampoline” (Cox, 1998) in the domain of minimum income has implicitly involved aligning passive programmes with aspirations and objectives tied to increase the labour supply (Marx & Nelson, 2013).

In this recommendation, the principle of ‘income adequacy’ aimed at protecting the individual basic right to resources and social assistance. This right, however, “should be combined with active availability for work and for vocational training”, in particular for those who are able to work (European Commission, 2008). Incentives to seek employment had to be prioritised, alongside benefit amounts adjusted or supplemented to meet specific needs. ‘Inclusive labour markets’ referred to expanding and improving human capital through education and training policies; the development of active and preventive labour markets –through tailored, personalised and responsive services–; job search assistance, and other supportive policies. ‘Access to quality services’ encompassed not just employment and training services, but also housing support, childcare, and long-term care.

## 2.1 | Categorising varieties of MIS (1990–2020)

The multidimensional notion of the active inclusion approach has encouraged countries to adopt human capital formation policies with a more demanding labour market participation approach (Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017). This subsection reviews the scholarly literature that has integrated these two dimensions into the analysis of MIS and explains how the incorporation of these policy items have implied new categorisations of WoM. Hence, this review sets the stage for the empirical exploration into the evolution of the four varieties of MIS over time.

The literature has distinguished several varieties of MIS since the 1990s. Between the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, these contributions underpinned different varieties focusing on the extent, generosity, expenditure and governance of such programmes (see for instance Lødemel & Schulte, 1992; Gough et al., 1997; Gough, 2001; Hölsch & Kraus, 2004, 2006 and Bahle et al., 2011). However, up-to-date studies have incorporated the activation dimension within this policy field in the analyses (Busilacchi, 2013; Clegg, 2013; Eichhorst et al., 2023; Frazer & Marlier, 2016; Heidenreich et al., 2014; Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017; Natili, 2020). In this vein, the way in which these strategies –both workfare and enabling– have been introduced into these policies has a central role in determining the different varieties of MIS.

Several scholars have assessed the extent to which European countries improved active inclusion principles within minimum income protection (Clegg, 2013; Frazer & Marlier, 2016; Heidenreich et al., 2014). Although the policy picture is mixed across European welfare states, these authors frequently find lack of adequate income levels, limited coverage and a slight tendency to place emphasis on employment measures and benefit conditionality,

especially in Southern and Eastern countries. Continental and Scandinavian countries generally offer more comprehensive activation services, higher income levels, and broader coverage, with some exceptions.

Marchal and Van Mechelen seminal work (Marchal & van Mechelen, 2017) conduct a comprehensive study across 19 EU countries for 2012. Countries are categorised according to the interaction among sufficient income support, labour market incentives –workfare–, enabling activation, and access to quality services. These elements are combined differently by country, giving rise to hybrid types: enabling-centered, comprehensive, incentive-centered, and passive. They find that all countries fall short in at least one aspect, typically in providing adequate income support. Only Continental countries and Finland align to some degree with the active inclusion ideal, but some of them still exhibit inadequate benefit levels, while others lack financial incentives. Southern –Italy and Portugal– and Eastern –Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria– countries prioritise financial incentives over enabling policies. Estonia stands as an exception, lacking substantial membership scores in any dimension. In summary, the positive response to the active inclusion approach from Continental and Nordic welfare states contrasts with variability and lack of response in Southern and Eastern countries, which mostly rely on work incentives.

Building upon this literature, Natili (2020) proposed four WoM across European welfare states. This new framework considered three dimensions: protectiveness –considering coverage, generosity and expenditure–; enabling activation –types of active inclusion services– and work conditionality –workfare–. The way in which these dimensions might be combined results in four WoM: inadequate, sanctionary, protective and enabling, illustrated in the following Table 1:

Overall, these previous studies consistently indicate that varieties of MIS often challenge Esping-Andersen's (1990) 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' categorisation, as significant disparities emerge not only between welfare regimes but also within them. Additionally, when considering the activation dimension, MIS do not neatly align with classifications of social assistance regimes (Bahle et al., 2011; Gough, 2001; Gough et al., 1997). However, a prevalent policy trend in this domain is the correlation between income protection and enabling activation measures: European countries that invest more in the former tend to exhibit stronger commitments to the latter (Iacono, 2017; Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017; Natili, 2020). There is also a consensus that Southern and Eastern European countries introduce more work incentives than other countries, while less protectiveness and coverage.

## 2.2 | WoM: Workfare at the expense of welfare?

This article contends that the reviewed literature has not properly addressed the potential impact of introducing the activation dimension into MIS on institutional change over time, nor has it critically discussed the tensions that these changes may entail for minimum income claimants (for an exception see Clegg, 2013). To address this gap, this section explores relevant literature on the shift towards workfare in social policy. This exploration informs the development of our guiding hypothesis, which is subsequently tested through an empirical analysis that provides a temporal comparison.

The mainstream welfare state literature has stated the presence of institutional mechanisms –that is, stickiness of institutions, path dependence, veto points– and electoral support for core social programmes as key factors

**TABLE 1** The four worlds of minimum income.

| WoM         | Protectiveness | Enabling | Workfare | Examples         |
|-------------|----------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Inadequate  | –              | –        | –        | Latvia, Italy    |
| Sanctionary | –              | –        | +        | Spain, Estonia   |
| Protective  | +              | +        | +        | Germany, Greece  |
| Enabling    | +              | +        | –        | Denmark, Belgium |

Source: Natili (2020).

resisting policy change (Pierson, 1996). This literature sees policy change as regime-specific (Esping-Andersen, 1996; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Pierson, 2001; Vis, 2007). On the contrary, the regulation approach to political economy suggests economic and political factors driving a paradigm shift from the KWS to the SWR (Jessop, 1993, 1999, 2004; Peck, 2001, 2002; Torfing, 1999). The KWS, focusing on full employment and mass consumption through welfare rights and new forms of collective consumption, adapted during its crisis to prioritise innovation, flexibility and structural competitiveness, intervening in the supply-side. This signified a productivist reordering of social policy, aligning with the requirements of labour market flexibility and employability needs. This shift diminished the emphasis on redistributive welfare rights in favour of welfare services catering to firms' demands (Jessop, 1993). This approach describes this process as the 'institutional codification of work-oriented welfare reform' (Peck, 2001, p. 342), which involves a deliberate process of 'fast policy transfer' in terms of speed, scale, and scope (Peck, 2002).

This emphasis on flexibility and employability at the expense of individual needs is substantiated to some extent in recent studies of the welfare scholarship. Heins and Bennett (2018) explain that post-crisis labour market policies shifted to even more flexibility and conditionality and less income protection in the UK. From a broader perspective, Ferragina (2022) shows a 'double movement' across 21 high-income countries in which welfare states have shifted priorities from compensatory to activation policies. This adjustment entails countries reallocating resources towards employment-related policies at the expense of compensatory measures such as unemployment benefits and family allowances. Other authors provide a more moderate perspective in comparative terms, indicating that while benefit conditionality and sanctions of unemployment protection have escalated over the last decades, the emergence of a 'workfare regime' is not in line with the actual extent to which these rules have been tightened overall (Knotz, 2018).

Some social policy scholars have implicitly suggested that similar patterns may be emerging within the realm of minimum income. These studies indicate that income protection has been inadequate for households below the EU poverty threshold (Marx & Nelson, 2013), highlighting a systemic issue prevalent across European countries since the 1990s (Cantillon et al., 2015; Iacono, 2017). In this line, while the adequacy of income support for individuals on low income remained relatively stable until 1995, sitting just below 50% of the national median income, it began to decline over the subsequent decade, dipping below 40% by 2005. The average adequacy then steadied, maintaining a position slightly above the 40% mark of median income, yet still lower than levels observed during the 1990s (Marx et al., 2014: 27). In consequence, various European countries were failing to cover a significant portion of the population in severe poverty by 2015, with only Germany, Ireland, France, and Denmark providing support for both severe poverty and economic vulnerability at that time (Natili, 2020). As a result of these trends, certain scholars have argued that an exclusive focus on work or employability as the solution to poverty has resulted in the neglect of 'positive' MIS in recent decades (Marchal et al., 2014).

Yet, this literature lacks empirical evidence regarding the extent to which this work-focused shift has transpired in the domain of MIS, and to what extent this shift has been driven by path dependent dynamics or by convergence towards a workfare model. In this context, the empirical analysis of this article tests the argument posed by regulation approach literature, which states that workfare becomes the institutional codification of work-oriented welfare reform irrespective of the welfare state and policy scale (Jessop, 1993, 1999, 2004; Peck, 2001; Torfing, 1999). As a result, our guiding hypothesis for the 'minimum income scale' is that countries will experience changes towards the protective, inadequate, or sanctionary WoM, rather than towards the enabling. These shifts may result from decreasing protectiveness, increasing workfare, or both.

### 3 | RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1 | Varieties and types of change

To investigate the evolution of WoM and observe changes between and/or within WoM, the article employs Natili's proposed typology (Natili, 2020), hence integrating three fundamental dimensions identified by the author:

protectiveness, enabling activation, and workfare activation. Therefore, it first evaluates to which WoM countries belonged to in 2008, and then it measures and interprets how they have evolved until 2022. The cases under analysis are Denmark, Germany, Spain, Italy, Estonia and Hungary.<sup>1</sup> The reason for including one extra-case for Southern and Eastern welfare states is that poverty and social exclusion rates are a major concern in these young democracies (Nelson, 2010), in addition to having developed weak MIS for many decades (Ferrera, 2005; Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017). Therefore, assessing the potential turning point for institutional changes in these cases is noteworthy within the active inclusion context. To measure institutional change, this article relies on two types of policy change. Following Vis (2007), it considers that a quantitative change takes place when a country transitions within the same WoM, representing a variety-specific alteration persisting within the same typology. A qualitative change occurs when a country transitions from one WoM to another; a country's shift from the inadequate to the sanctionary WoM exemplifies a qualitative change.

### 3.2 | Data

As illustrated in Table 2, the dataset comprises five indicators for both 2008 and 2022,<sup>2</sup> strategically aligned with the three policy dimensions outlined in Natili's framework (Natili, 2020): (1) income adequacy data to measure 'protectiveness' (OECD, 2008a; 2022a),<sup>3</sup> following the prevalent approach of setting income protection relative to 60% of national median income (Cantillon et al., 2020); expenditure data for (2) training and (3) PES (OECD) to measure 'enabling activation' (OECD, 2008b; 2022b), widely employed as a prime measure of welfare state change (Siegel, 2007)<sup>4</sup>; and benefit design, discerning between (4) workfare and (5) enabling components. In this vein, it is argued that the collection of non-spending aspects on welfare policies is important for the evaluation of welfare state change (Scruggs, 2007), as qualitative and more detailed analyses are more prone to show change than pure quantitative analyses (Taylor-Gooby, 2002) (Table 2).

For the design indicators, the article follows the conventional dichotomy of workfare and enabling activation explained earlier (Dingeldey, 2007; Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008; Larsen, 2005). Rather than disentangling enabling activation into different categories as suggested by Bonoli (2010, 2011), we consolidate it within a unique indicator due to methodological issues.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the enabling design comprises job search assistance, training programmes, childcare support and case-management. The workfare design indicator assesses countries' score based on their stance on the (restrictiveness of) definition of suitable job offer, the maximum number of job rejections, the coersiveness of sanctions, the compulsion of activation measures and time limits attached to the benefit. In this context,

**TABLE 2** Operationalisation of indicators.

| Policy dimension    | Indicators   | Source   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Protectiveness      | Income adequacy: minimum income benefit as % of the median disposable income in the country -couple; two children- | OECD data  |
| Enabling activation | Public expenditure on PES (% GDP)<br>Public expenditure on training (% GDP)<br>Benefit design (enabling items)     | OECD stats<br>OECD stats<br>MISSOC; official documents; secondary literature |
| Workfare activation | Benefit design (benefit conditionality items)  | MISSOC; official documents; secondary literature                             |

Abbreviation: MISSOC, mutual information system on social protection.

Source: Own elaboration.

a comprehensive examination of legislative documents, secondary literature, expert country reports<sup>6</sup> and the MIS-SOC database (MISSOC, 2008; 2022) has been undertaken to systematically encode, employing a modified framework derived from Immervol and Knotz (2018: 26).<sup>7</sup>

The article empirically contributes to the literature in two ways. First, by extending the notion of workfare, including the compulsion of work-related activities and time limits into the analysis. According to the literature, the aim of these measures relates to the workfare dimension as they make the benefit less attractive and promote a quick labour market return (Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008:11). Second, and as a consequence of the first contribution, it provides new workfare and enabling scores for six EU countries.

### 3.3 | Method

Previous literature has used qualitative comparative analysis (Moreira, 2008), fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (Marchal & van Mechelen, 2017), cluster analysis (Gough, 2001) and descriptive analyses (Natili, 2020) to explore WoM. In contrast, this article employs PCA for two primary reasons. The first reason refers to the assessment of multidimensional social policies (Ferragina & Filetti, 2022). In the active inclusion approach, WoM are developed by considering the multifaceted interplay of various policy elements, including protectiveness, enabling measures, and workfare activation. Thus, the PCA method emerges as particularly adept for capturing the complex policy field of minimum income given its inherent multidimensional nature (Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017). Secondly, the method holds considerable potential to capture how social policies change over time, and the evolving significance of the various policy dimensions within these transformations –represented in a biplot– (Ferragina, 2022; Ferragina et al., 2013; Ferragina & Filetti, 2022).

To sum up, the article argues for the importance of ‘multidimensional description’ in understanding the relationship between varieties and time (Gerring, 2012). It asserts that constructing varieties of MIS enhances rigorous concept formation and measurement within this policy field (Collier et al., 2012). Scholars have used typologies to introduce conceptual and theoretical innovations, often refining them (Collier et al., 2012). This is exemplified by our extension of the notion of workfare compared to previous research in this policy domain. Furthermore, the article posits that ‘mapping empirical changes’ is a significant source of innovation in typologies, which can evolve over specific periods of time (Collier et al., 2012; Greve, 2019, regarding welfare state change).

The PCA operates as follows: each original variable influences the definition of the two principal components (PCs) (Ferragina & Filetti, 2022). The correlation index used ranges from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , where  $-1$  signifies a perfect negative correlation,  $0$  means no correlation, and  $+1$  indicates a perfect positive correlation. Assessing the correlation between indicators and PCs is crucial for understanding each variable's significance in defining these axes. In this regard, the stronger the correlation between a variable and the PCs, the greater its contribution to axis definition and interpretation. As a result, a country's position in the two-dimensional biplot depends on the extent of correlation between each indicator, the two PCs, and a country-specific combination of institutional indicators (Ferragina & Filetti, 2022).

## 4 | ASSESSING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHANGES IN THE FOUR WoM

The two axes explain about 70% of the total variance of the data for both time points (Figures A3 and A4). The horizontal axis of the bi-dimensional plot represents the extent to which countries invest more or less in protectiveness and enabling activation, while the vertical axis mainly shows differences in workfare activation. This allows us to position countries based on their priorities across these dimensions. Specifically, the horizontal axis (PC1) is structured –for both time points– around the positive correlation between protectiveness and enabling activation (see

**TABLE 3** Defining the bi-plot: Correlation index between indicators.

| Indicators             | PC1 (2008)  | PC1 (2022)  | PC2 (2008)  | PC2 (2022)  |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Protectiveness         |             |             |             |             |
| Income adequacy        | <b>0.95</b> | <b>0.97</b> | 0.20        | -0.08       |
| Enabling activation    |             |             |             |             |
| Benefit design         | <b>0.95</b> | <b>0.77</b> | 0.16        | <b>0.53</b> |
| PES expenditure        | <b>0.95</b> | <b>0.96</b> | -0.20       | 0.01        |
| Training expenditure   | <b>0.81</b> | <b>0.95</b> | -0.57       | -0.01       |
| Workfare activation    |             |             |             |             |
| Benefit design         | 0.33        | -0.36       | <b>0.93</b> | <b>0.90</b> |
| Explained variance (%) | 70.4        | 70.3        |             | 22.3        |

Note: In bold the indicators more positively or negatively correlated with PC1 and PC2 in 2008 and 2022.

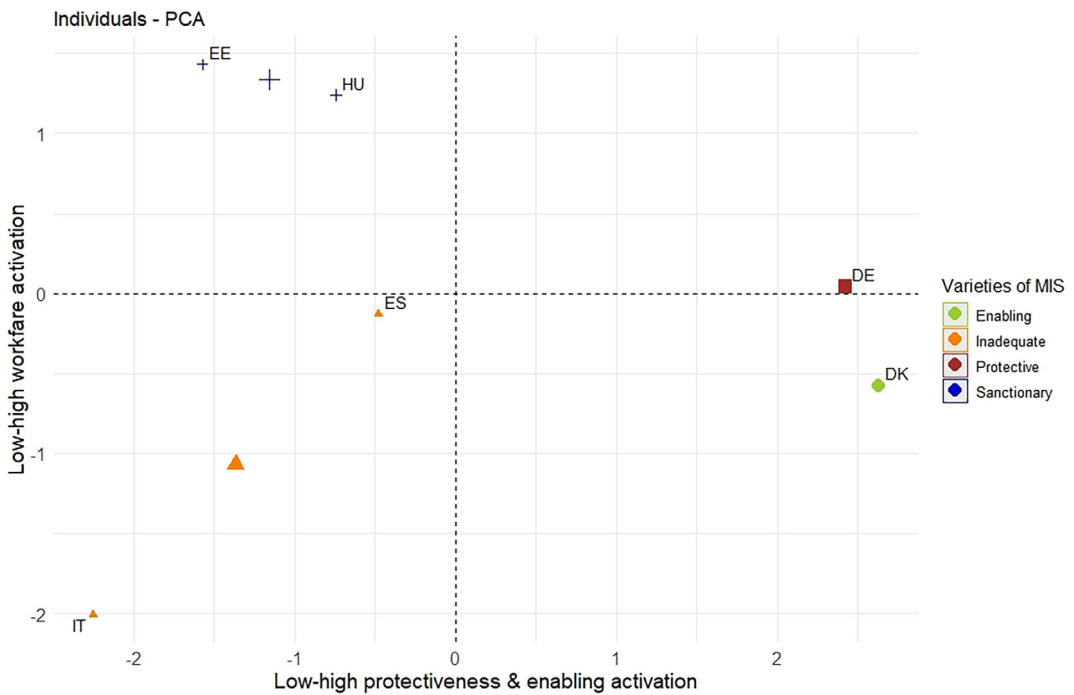
Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the PCA.

Figures A1 and A2 in annexes). This correlation is in line with previous literature that links more investment in protectiveness with more investment in enabling activation (Iacono, 2017; Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017; Natili, 2020). The vertical axis (PC2) is mainly formed by the workfare activation indicator. In 2022, PC2 also shows a moderate correlation with enabling design, indicating that enabling activation is often employed alongside workfare tools (Horn et al., 2023). Table 3 indicates the correlation index contributing to the definition and interpretation of the axis (Figures A3 and A4).

Against this background, the biplot is interpreted as follows. Countries with high protectiveness and enabling activation are located on the right-hand side of the biplot, whereas those with lower levels of these indicators are positioned on the left-hand side. Countries with stronger workfare are closer to the top, whereas those with lower workfare scores are closer to the bottom. Hence, the first quadrant includes countries that have low levels of protectiveness, limited enabling activation and strong workfare activation –sanctionary–. The second quadrant –in clockwise order– entails countries with high protectiveness and enabling activation and also strong workfare –protective–. Countries in the third quadrant incorporate high protectiveness and enabling activation, coupled with low workfare –enabling–. In the fourth quadrant are situated countries that exhibit limited workfare together with low protectiveness and enabling activation –inadequate–.

## 5 | WORLDS OF LAST RESORT SAFETY NETS, 2008–2022

As for 2008 (Figure 1), the PCA displays Eastern countries –Estonia and Hungary– within the sanctionary WoM and Southern countries –Spain and Italy– within the inadequate one. The two Eastern countries combined extensive workfare with low investment in protectiveness and enabling activation, with Estonia exhibiting slightly less emphasis on the latter. Both countries had mandatory labour market activities and strong sanctions for non-compliance. In Hungary, for example, the benefit was terminated if the person was deleted from the registry of job seekers due to their own fault or if they refused a proper job offer (Fruzsina, 2009). In contrast to Hungary and Estonia, Spain shows for 2008 a slightly lower level of workfare and less protectiveness, falling within the inadequate space. However, it could be considered as a hybrid case due to its proximity to the sanctionary quadrant. Italy stands out as a clear example of inadequate WoM, as the existing safety net at that time, the Social Card, imposed no conditionality, offered no enabling services, and provided only a residual income amount of 40 euros per month (Madama et al., 2014).



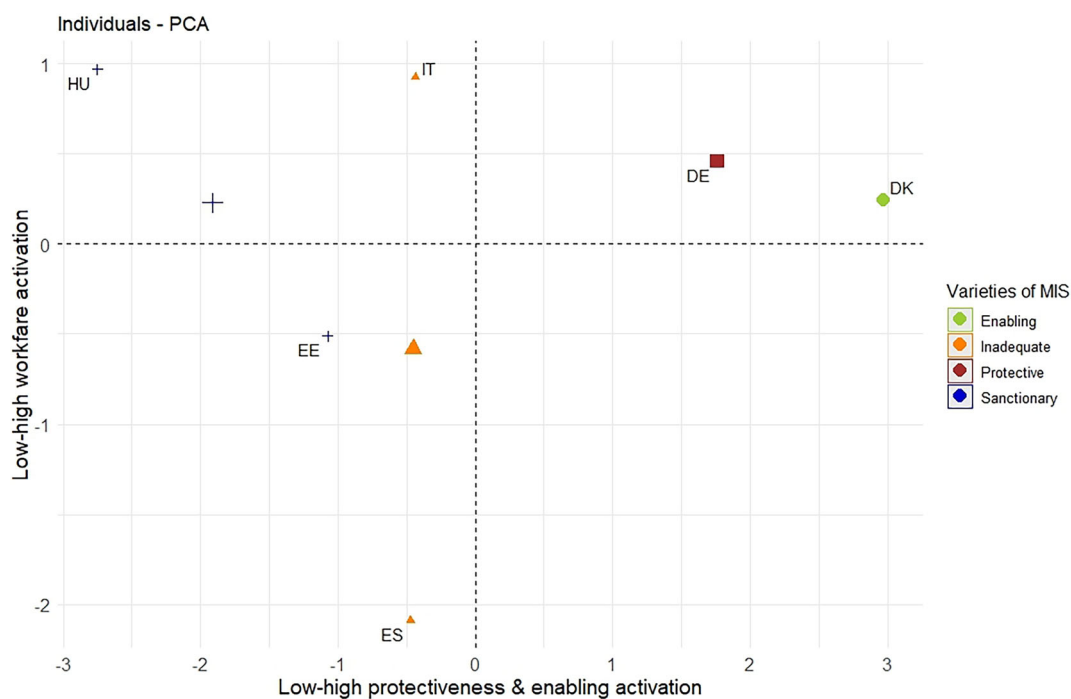
**FIGURE 1** Mapping worlds of last-resort safety nets, 2008. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Germany emerges as a prototype of the protective strategy. Its position arises from the coexistence of robust income protection and a comprehensive range of enabling services, alongside relevant conditionality. The national MIS at that time included mandatory ‘integration agreements’ and punitive measures, ranging from 30% to 100% of the standard amount for three months when refusing a work offer, work programme, or activation measure (Grages et al., 2021). The position of Denmark within the enabling quadrant indicates a combination of generous income protection, strong enabling activation and low conditionality. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the country implemented some sanctions if claimants fail to engage in certain labour market-related activities, which places the country as a hybrid case near the protective space.

This initial assessment contributes to the literature as a novel finding. While the works of Marchal and van Mechelen (2017) and Natili (2020) explore varieties of MIS for the years 2012–2015, this article establishes the positions of WoM preceding these studies. Following this initial examination, the article performs the analysis for 2022 in order to address our research questions.

The second PCA (Figure 2) reflects both qualitative and quantitative changes of WoM from 2008 to 2022, indicating significant policy alterations over time. Except for Spain and Estonia, a general movement towards the Y-axis is observed for 2022, indicating that most of such movements have been influenced by a workfare shift.

Denmark has joined Germany in the protective space, undergoing a qualitative change. This movement is primarily attributed to lower investment in protectiveness and enabling activation –in particular in training expenditure–while reinforcing the workfare structure of the benefit. Germany’s movement towards the left of the bi-plot is explained by a reduction in protectiveness and training expenditure. Italy moved upward to the sanctionary WoM, joining Hungary in the sanctionary space. This qualitative movement seems to be the result of a ‘workfarisation’ process envisaged within the policy reforms concerning the *Reddito di Cittadinanza* –approved in 2019 and tightened in 2022–. Notwithstanding sharing the same space, Hungary is distinguished by a significant reduction in overall



**FIGURE 2** Mapping worlds of last-resort safety nets, 2022. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jspol.13977)]

protectiveness and weak enabling activation. In contrast, Italy maintains a significantly higher level of protectiveness and achieves a higher score in both enabling design and expenditure. Therefore, it would seem that the only factor preventing Italy from a qualitative change to the protective model is its lower expenditure on these policies compared to Denmark and Germany. Hence, Italy could also be defined as a hybrid case due to its proximity to the protective quadrant, whereas Hungary clearly exemplifies a sanctionary case.

In contrast, Estonia and Spain are the only countries in our sample that do not experience a workfarisation process. Estonia has undergone a qualitative change from the sanctionary to the inadequate WoM, while Spain has experienced a quantitative change within the latter. In Estonia, protectiveness has increased only slightly: from 23% to 28% of the median disposable income in the country. Also, while the country allocated 0.04% of its GDP to PES and 0.02 to training, it allocated 0.17% and 0.14% in 2022, respectively. These increases allowed Estonia to move slightly towards the right-hand of the biplot, but they weren't adequate for a more compelling shift, ultimately falling into the inadequate quadrant. Another factor contributing to this movement has been the country's failure to enhance the enabling design of the benefit –marked by the lowest score within the sample–, which partly contributed to the construction of the PC2 –the vertical axis–. In any case, the conditional nature of the benefit keeps it fairly close to the upper quadrant, presenting itself as a hybrid case between the inadequate and sanctionary quadrants.

In light of the 2020 implementation of a new national benefit, four factors are proposed to explain the quantitative shift observed in Spain within the inadequate WoM and the lack of more compelling movement towards the enabling space. First, Spain's low workfare score in the new national benefit programme places it at the bottom of the biplot; second, the country still falls behind in protectiveness compared to Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Estonia; third, investment in activation programs remains inadequate; and fourth, the enabling design indicator score is even lower than in 2008. It is suggested this may be due to Spain's highly decentralised activation policies and services, resulting in a lack of ambitious design in this area due to the state's limited authority for implementation. In this context, the significant contribution of the enabling design on the construction of the horizontal axis (PC2) in 2022

hinders Spain from making a more pronounced shift towards the enabling quadrant. This case evidences that enabling activation must be effectively coordinated both vertically -across different levels of government with relevant competences- and horizontally, securing the necessary capacities to deliver appropriately such services to minimum income claimants (Clegg, 2013).

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

This article has measured and interpreted the evolution of WoM from 2008 to 2022 in six welfare states. In doing so, it has investigated whether the four varieties of MIS have changed over time, and to what extent these changes have been driven by path dependence dynamics or by convergence towards a workfare model over other varieties. Natili's (2020) conceptualisation has helped to interpret the space in which countries move over the period, as it considers the multi-dimensional nature of the current MIS, including protectiveness, enabling activation, and workfare activation. At the theoretical level, our inquiry tests the argument proposed by the regulation approach (Jessop, 1993, 1999; Peck, 2001; Torfing, 1999), which suggests a welfare-to-workfare shift regardless of the welfare state regime and the policy scale.

In doing so, this article has contributed to the comparative welfare state literature in two ways. In the first place, the article has employed a PCA for the first time in this policy domain. This method emerges as particularly adept for capturing the complex policy field of minimum income policy, a domain scholars recognise for its inherent multidimensional nature (Marchal & Van Mechelen, 2017). Further, the method holds significant potential to capture how social policies change over time, and the evolving significance of the various policy dimensions within these transformations (Ferragina, 2022; Ferragina et al., 2013; Ferragina & Filetti, 2022). Moreover, the article has introduced two novel indicators that offer new scores into the dimensions of enabling and workfare activation across the six European countries. In the second place, the article has contributed by proposing a temporal approach for the analysis of WoM. With regards to this, the PCA illustrates a notable workfare trend in four of the six countries. This trend stems from a stagnation in investment in income protection -except for Italy-, limited enabling opportunities, and the introduction of specific, incremental workfare reforms. It is also worth noting that, while there are shifts among varieties, the PCA reveals that some countries can be defined as hybrid cases (Ferragina et al., 2013), as it might be the case of Italy, Spain, and Denmark in 2022.

As for 2008, the PCA places Estonia and Hungary within the sanctionary WoM and Spain and Italy within the inadequate one. Germany appears as a protective WoM while Denmark is placed within the enabling space. As for 2022, the PCA reflects both qualitative and quantitative changes of WoM between and within varieties. Except for Spain and Estonia, countries' movements tend to be upward, indicating a workfare shift. This is especially true for the Italian case, which has undergone qualitative change towards the sanctionary WoM. However, its improvement in protectiveness and enabling activation positions it as a hybrid case, close to the protective model. Hungary, on the other hand, has reduced protectiveness and enabling services while maintaining a strong workfare approach, positioning itself as a clear sanctionary case. Denmark has undergone a qualitative change to the protective space, joining Germany. This change has been mainly attributed to lower investment in protectiveness and enabling activation while reinforcing workfare elements. This confirms that the Danish model may not be as enabling as in the 80s and early 90s, when the literature emphasised its human-capital oriented dimension (Dingeldey, 2007). The PCA therefore reinforces those studies highlighting the policy shift towards a workfare approach in Denmark from the 1990s onwards (Greve, 2020; Kvist & Harsløf, 2014; Torfing, 1999).

In contrast, Estonia and Spain are the only countries in our sample that do not experience a workfarisation process. Estonia has undergone a qualitative change from the sanctionary to the inadequate WoM, while Spain has experienced a quantitative change within the latter. The stagnation or limited movements of the cases of Spain and Estonia are the result of gradual improvements in protectiveness without corresponding efforts in the enabling dimension. Spain's stagnation within this WoM is further explained by a weak enabling design, preventing it from moving into the enabling space. These findings illustrate that some countries have not interconnected their welfare functions -income protection and enabling activation- in a way that allows them to perform effectively in policy practice (Hemerijck et al., 2023).

In a nutshell, this article has shown that the linkage of income support with labour market integration has not been complemented by the provision of enabling services that can help minimum income claimants address complex barriers. However, there has been a broader trend among welfare states towards workfare strategies such as tightening the definition of an adequate job offer or enhancing sanctions, albeit with variations in their scope. This finding is in line with previous research that has evidenced this shift since the 1990s (Horn et al., 2023) and particularly after the Great Recession (Lødemel & Moreira, 2014; Lødemel & Moreira, 2022; Marchal et al., 2014). We add to this literature that this strengthening of benefit conditionality has been concurrently accompanied by a reduction in income protection and a stagnation or reduction of enabling activation.

This trend towards workfare over welfare within the domain of MIS might suggest a potential erosion of the fundamental entitlement to these benefits, since this shift may entail the growing use of coercive measures which have proven to be ineffective, stigmatising, and marginalising in multiple contexts (Raffass, 2017; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018). However, the cases of Estonia and Spain underscore that workfare policy change does not occur independently of the welfare state regime or the policy scale. Nonetheless, these two cases do not demonstrate significant improvements in protectiveness and enabling activation. Bringing it all together, this article shows that considerable progress is still needed to establish adequate safety nets within the contemporary European social model. On another note, the different movements of the WoM open the door to new research questioning the political and institutional factors that have allowed for these shifts.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Table A1 in the appendix shows the scheme included for each country. In 2008, Spain and Italy lacked a comprehensive national MIS. Spain relied on a regional minimum income system. To address this limitation, the average protectiveness of regional MIS is measured using the OECD's formula for income adequacy. Also, due to the lack of comprehensive data for all regions in terms of workfare and enabling activation, the article focused on the MIS of the 'Comunidad de Madrid', considered a 'prototype' as it is not excessively influenced by strong territorial cleavages or high economic pressures (Natali, 2018). Meanwhile, Italy relied on the Social Card (Madama et al., 2014). Given its absence from the OECD database, the policy information has been extracted directly from secondary literature.
- <sup>2</sup> Italy and Germany carried out reforms in this policy field in 2023 which are not included in this article due to the time frame and the fact that the expert country reports were conducted prior to such reforms.
- <sup>3</sup> Similar cross-nationally comparable data on coverage is unavailable for the two time points in these countries.
- <sup>4</sup> Similar cross-nationally comparable data that specifically concerns MIS for enabling activation expenditure is not available. However, we use the PES and training indicators which encompass expenditure on administrative costs associated with both active and passive programmes, spanning from central management to regional and local offices –where MIS are

managed. Therefore, these indicators also incorporate the rest of income support payments (OECD, 2022c). Furthermore, it is worth noting that MIS are conceived as one part of a comprehensive -and interconnected- policy mix that comprises income support with human capital stocks and appropriate enabling services (Clegg, 2016; Hemerijck et al., 2023).

<sup>5</sup> All the dimensions related to “enabling activation” correlate in the PCA. For this reason, there is no need to use them separately.

<sup>6</sup> Expert country reports have been provided by the project “Euroship: Closing Gaps in Social Citizenship.”

<sup>7</sup> Data on the coding process is available upon request.

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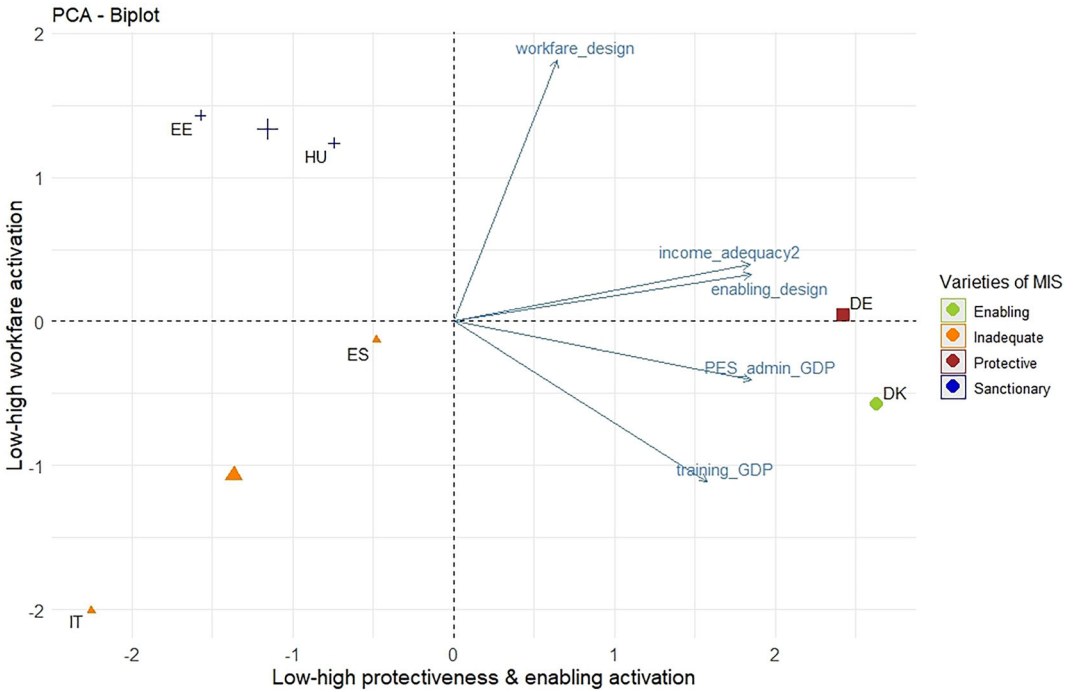
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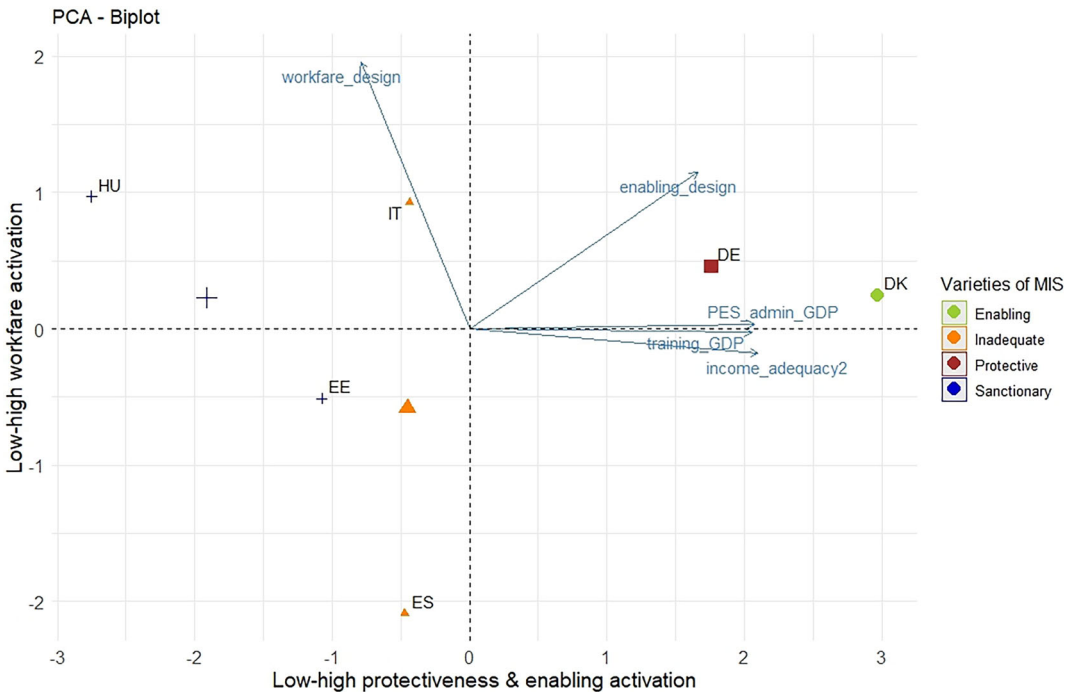
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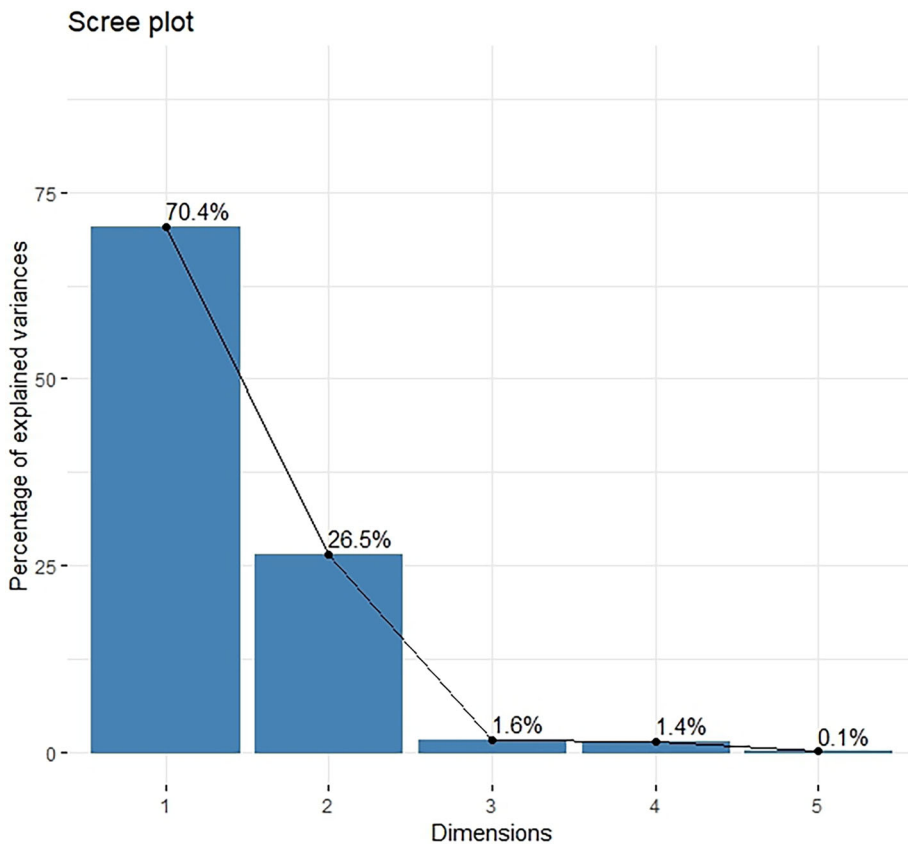
APPENDIX A



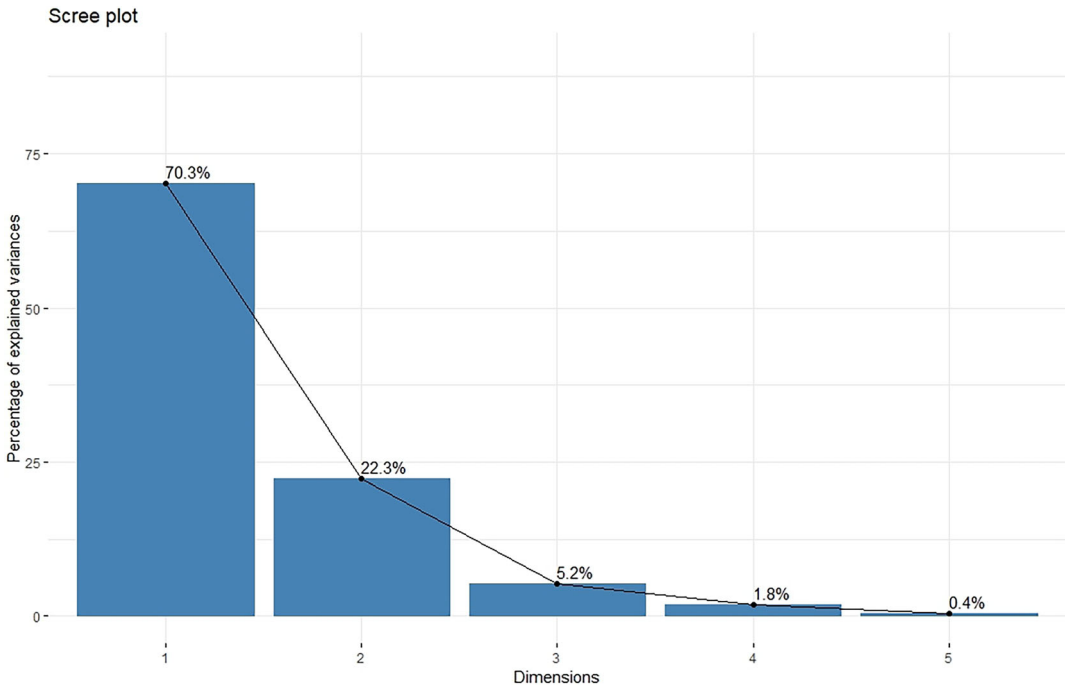
**FIGURE A1** PCA correlations, 2008. Source: Elaborated by the author based on OECD data and own elaborated indicators. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE A2** PCA correlations, 2022. Source: Elaborated by the author based on OECD data and own elaborated indicators. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE A3** Explained variance, 2008. Source: Elaborated by the author based on OECD data and own elaborated indicators. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE A4** Explained variance, 2022. Source: Elaborated by the author based on OECD data and own elaborated indicators. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

**TABLE A1** List of schemes included.

|         | 2008                                 | 2022                                 |
|---------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Denmark | Social assistance benefit.           | Social assistance benefit.           |
| Germany | Basic income support for jobseekers. | Basic income support for jobseekers. |
| Spain   | Regional schemes. Not unified.       | Minimum living income.               |
| Italy   | Social card.                         | Citizenship income.                  |
| Estonia | Subsistence benefit.                 | Subsistence benefit.                 |
| Hungary | Employment replacement subsidy.      | Employment replacement subsidy.      |

Source: Own elaboration.