



# ESIP-ZUS Conference

Warsaw, 11 June 2026

*"Social security driving social inclusion and preventing poverty"*

Conference report



EUROPEAN SOCIAL INSURANCE PLATFORM



On 11 June 2026, the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP), together with the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), co-organised a public conference in Warsaw titled “**Social security driving social inclusion and preventing poverty**”. The event brought together representatives from social security institutions, the European Commission, academia and civil society organisations to exchange views on the role of social security institutions in preventing poverty and supporting social inclusion across Europe.

Shortly after the publication of the European Commission's EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, which aims to accelerate progress towards the European Pillar of Social Rights target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030, the conference explored how social security institutions can contribute to the effective implementation of the Strategy and help ensure that anti-poverty policies reach those most in need.

The conference gathered 125 participants and discussions covered topics such as adapting social protection systems to changing labour market realities, tackling the non-take-up of benefits, improving access to social rights through innovative outreach and digital tools, and strengthening cooperation between social insurance and social assistance.

Please visit the [Conference event page](#) on the ESIP website for all relevant information, including the programme and presentations shared during the event.



## Programme

Moderated by Yannis Natsis, Director, European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

10:00 Welcome speech by Paweł Jaroszek, Member of the Management Board supervising Finance and Income Realisation Division acting as a President, Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), Poland

10:10 Keynote speech by Olivier Bontout, Deputy Head of Unit for Social Policies, Child Guarantee, SPC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (*online*)

### Panel 1 ***Social security institutions preventing poverty at all stages (10:25-11:10)***

- *Pension poverty and contribution design: The case of the self-employed in Poland* – Janina Petelczyc, Doctor of Social Sciences, SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Poland
- *Pilot to tackle the non-take-up of AIO benefits (Supplementary Income Provision for Older Persons)* – Heike Xhonneux, Legal Policy Advisor International Social Security, Social Insurance Bank (SVB), the Netherlands
- *Tackling the non-take-up of social security benefits in Italy: The project "INPS for All" and the INPS Portal for Families* – Lara Chirico, Team Leader, Central Directorate for International Relations, National Social Security Institute (INPS), Italy

Coffee break 11:10-11:30

### Panel 2 ***Strengthening social inclusion to reduce poverty (11:30-12:25)***

- Ryszard Szarfenberg, Associate Professor in Political Science, University of Warsaw, Poland
- Olivier Bontout, Deputy Head of Unit for Social Policies, Child Guarantee, SPC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (*online*)
- Olivier Corbobesse, Director, European, International Relations and Cooperation Unit, National Family Benefits Fund (Cnaf), France
- Jakub Wilczek, President, Polish Federation for Solving the Problem of Homelessness, Poland

12:25 Closing remarks by Anne-Claire Le Bodic, President, ESIP

## About the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

The European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) represents 46 national statutory social insurance organisations in 19 EU Member States and Switzerland, active in the field of health, insurance, pensions, occupational disease and accident insurance, disability and rehabilitation, family benefits and unemployment insurance. ESIP and its members aim to preserve high profile social security for Europe, reinforce solidarity-based social insurance systems and maintain European social protection quality. ESIP builds strategic alliances for developing common positions to influence the European debate and is a consultation forum for European institutions and other multinational bodies active in the field of social security.

### *Paweł Jaroszek's welcome speech*

In his opening remarks, **Paweł Jaroszek**, Member of the Management Board supervising the Finance and Income Realisation Division and acting President of the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), reflected on the important role that social security institutions play in preventing poverty and supporting social cohesion.

He noted that the primary mission of social insurance is to protect people against life risks through the provision of a wide range of social security benefits, including old-age pensions, sickness benefits, maternity benefits or incapacity benefits. In parallel, social assistance systems play a key complementary role



in supporting vulnerable individuals and households facing poverty or social exclusion. While social insurance and social assistance traditionally operate as separate pillars in Poland, Mr Jaroszek invited participants to reflect on whether stronger cooperation and a more integrated approach could improve the effectiveness of social policies.

Against this background, he described the conference as a valuable opportunity to bring together practitioners, policymakers and other key stakeholders to exchange experiences and discuss how social security institutions can better contribute to preventing poverty and social exclusion. He stressed that effective social policies require the right tools and innovative approaches, particularly to identify and reach individuals who do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

### *Olivier Bontout's keynote speech*

Delivering the keynote speech, **Olivier Bontout**, Deputy Head of Unit for Social Policies, Child Guarantee and Social Protection Committee (SPC) at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), presented the rationale behind the recently adopted EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and its role in accelerating poverty reduction across Europe.

Mr Bontout noted that more than one in five Europeans remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion and argued that progress towards reducing poverty in recent years has not been sufficiently rapid, particularly regarding child poverty. Beyond its social consequences, he stressed that child poverty entails significant economic costs, estimated at around 3.4% of EU GDP. He emphasised that living in dignity is a fundamental right and underlined the importance of early intervention, noting that timely action can generate substantial long-term social and economic benefits.

He explained that the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy recognises the multidimensional nature of poverty and therefore combines measures addressing different stages of life with actions tackling broader structural challenges. The Strategy includes initiatives targeting childhood, adulthood and old age, while also addressing horizontal challenges such as discrimination and stigma.

Particular attention was given to the strengthening of the European Child Guarantee, which seeks to address the long-term consequences of childhood poverty through improved access to essential services and stronger support for families. Mr Bontout stressed the importance of robust social safety nets, improving the take-up of benefits and services, and supporting parents' access to employment. He also referred to future initiatives aimed at strengthening the implementation of anti-poverty policies, including work on addressing the non-take-up of benefits, efforts to prevent and tackle housing exclusion, and ongoing discussions on ensuring adequate funding for social inclusion policies under the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

### *Social security institutions preventing poverty at all stages*

Opening the first panel, **Janina Petelczyc**, Doctor of Social Sciences at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics, examined the growing risk of pension poverty among self-employed workers in the context of changing labour markets. She noted that self-employment, including platform work, has increased significantly across Europe, while social protection systems remain largely designed around traditional employment relationships.



Drawing on the Polish experience, Dr Petelczyc explained that many self-employed workers contribute significantly less to the pension system than employees, despite often earning comparable or even higher incomes. This is partly due to the existence of flat-rate contributions and a wide range of contribution relief measures available to the self-employed.

While these arrangements can reduce labour costs and encourage labour market flexibility, they may also weaken pension protection and increase the risk of poverty in old age. Drawing on recent research, she showed that many self-employed workers in Poland face the prospect of receiving pensions below the minimum pension threshold, requiring public subsidies to guarantee minimum income protection in retirement.

In her conclusion, Dr Petelczyc argued that **social protection systems must adapt to evolving labour market realities**. She stressed that labour market flexibility should not come at the expense of adequate social protection and suggested that contribution regulations should increasingly reflect workers' actual income and degree of economic dependency rather than their legal status alone.

**Heike Xhonneux**, Legal Policy Advisor International Social Security at the Dutch Social Insurance Bank (SVB), presented an innovative pilot project aimed at reducing the non-take-up of the Supplementary Income Provision for Older Persons (AIO), a benefit designed to supplement the income of pensioners who do not qualify for a full Dutch state pension and whose household income remains below a minimum threshold.

She explained that studies had revealed substantial levels of non-take-up of the benefit, with estimates suggesting that between 48% and 56% of potentially eligible households were not claiming AIO. To address this challenge, the SVB developed a pilot project combining proactive outreach with innovative data-sharing techniques to better identify potential beneficiaries. The initiative built on existing efforts to promote take-up, including targeted communication campaigns, cooperation with municipalities and support for individuals transitioning from social assistance to retirement.

A key challenge was that the SVB lacked access to the income data necessary to identify potentially eligible households. To overcome this obstacle while fully respecting data protection requirements, the pilot made use of Multi-Party Computation (MPC), a technology that allows institutions to jointly analyse data without directly sharing personal information. This enabled the SVB to identify and contact households that were more likely to qualify for the benefit.

The pilot combined personalised letters, telephone outreach, handwritten postcards and, in some cases, home visits. Using MPC technology, the SVB narrowed an initial pool of approximately 20,000 potential cases to a target group of 1,000 households, ultimately identifying around 50 households eligible for the benefit. Although the number of beneficiaries identified through the pilot was limited, Ms Xhonneux stressed that the impact on the individuals concerned was significant and that the positive reactions received confirmed the value of proactive outreach.

**Lara Chirico**, Team Leader at the Central Directorate for International Relations of the Italian National Social Security Institute (INPS), presented two initiatives developed by INPS to tackle the non-take-up of social security benefits and improve access to rights for vulnerable groups.

Remarking that access to social security is not only a matter of public policy but also a constitutional principle in Italy, she explained that INPS has invested heavily in digitalisation, developing a “generative welfare” approach aimed at proactively identifying needs, supporting individuals throughout the access process and strengthening cooperation between institutions and local actors.

As part of this approach, Ms Chirico presented the initiative INPS per Tutti (“INPS for All”), which seeks to reach people in situations of severe social and economic vulnerability through dedicated welcome hubs operated in cooperation with partner organisations. She also presented the INPS Portal for Families, a digital platform designed to provide citizens with a single access point to information on family-related benefits and services, helping them identify the support for which they may be eligible.

A central message of her intervention was that digital tools can play an important role in improving access to social rights and reaching vulnerable groups more effectively. However, she emphasised that digitalisation alone is not sufficient and must be accompanied by cooperation between institutions, local outreach activities and personalised support to ensure that people can effectively exercise their rights.

### *Strengthening social inclusion to reduce poverty*

The second panel of the conference explored whether stronger cooperation between social security institutions and organisations providing social assistance can contribute to more effectively tackling poverty and social exclusion. While approaching the issue from different perspectives, panellists broadly agreed on the need to overcome institutional silos in order to provide more accessible and coordinated support to vulnerable groups.

**Ryszard Szarfenberg**, Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Warsaw, reflected on recent developments in Poland, where social security institutions have gradually assumed responsibility for administering certain benefits that traditionally fell within the domain of social assistance. He argued that the boundaries between different forms of social protection are becoming increasingly blurred and questioned whether social security institutions could play a greater role in delivering a wider range of social benefits. He also stressed the importance of adopting a rights-based approach to social inclusion policies and warned against territorial inequalities that can create unequal access to support across different regions.

Building on this perspective, **Olivier Bontout** noted that the success of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will depend not only on the availability of benefits and services but also on the ability of institutions to work together effectively. He highlighted the importance of integrated approaches that bring together different social services and policy areas throughout the life cycle, ensuring that individuals receive coordinated support rather than fragmented interventions.

Several speakers highlighted the importance of reducing the non-take-up of benefits through closer cooperation, improved data sharing and proactive outreach. **Olivier Corbobesse**, Director of the European, International Relations and Cooperation Unit at the French National Family Benefits Fund (Cnaf), presented several initiatives developed in France to simplify access to rights. These included systems of “connected rights”, whereby entitlement to one benefit can automatically facilitate



access to others, the automatic pre-filling of information for beneficiaries, and targeted outreach campaigns using data analysis to identify potential beneficiaries. Referring to the French initiative “Zero Non-Take-Up Territories”, he argued that social security institutions should pay as much attention to ensuring that eligible individuals receive the support they are entitled to as they do to preventing overpayments and fraud.

The discussion also highlighted the particular challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness. **Jakub Wilczek**, President of the Polish Federation for Solving the Problem of Homelessness, stressed that being entitled to rights does not necessarily mean being able to access them. He noted that people experiencing homelessness face particularly high levels of non-take-up of social benefits, not only because of administrative barriers but also because they are often difficult for institutions to reach. Their immediate priority is frequently survival rather than navigating complex administrative procedures. Mr Wilczek therefore stressed the importance of partnerships between social security institutions and organisations working directly with homeless people, as well as the need for better data collection to ensure that homelessness is adequately reflected in policy design. Ultimately, he argued that the most effective way to ensure access to rights is to end homelessness itself.

**Speakers agreed that stronger partnerships between social security institutions, local authorities and organisations working directly with vulnerable groups are essential to ensure that support reaches those most in need.**

The discussion concluded with reflections on the implementation of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the role of EU funding. Participants highlighted the value of exchanging good practices across Europe and emphasised the importance of involving social security institutions in the design and implementation of anti-poverty initiatives. Several speakers noted that the Strategy provides a useful framework for raising the profile of poverty reduction at national level and advocating for greater investment in social inclusion policies. In response, Mr Bontout recalled that **while EU funding frameworks can establish priorities and provide support, decisions on the allocation of resources remain largely in the hands of national authorities**. He nevertheless stressed the importance of continued dialogue with Member States to ensure that poverty reduction remains a key policy priority.

#### *Closing remarks by Anne-Claire Le Bodic*

**Anne-Claire Le Bodic**, President of ESIP, reflected on the broader purpose underpinning the work of social security institutions. She noted that, while discussions on social security coordination can often appear highly technical, they ultimately concern the lives of people, particularly those facing situations of vulnerability, poverty or social exclusion. She remarked that a common purpose of all social security institutions is contributing to creating more inclusive societies.

Reflecting on the discussions throughout the conference, Ms Le Bodic highlighted the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy as an important opportunity to place social security institutions at the centre of efforts to prevent and reduce poverty. She stressed that these institutions possess valuable expertise, operational experience and direct contact with beneficiaries, which can help ensure that anti-poverty policies are both effectively designed and successfully implemented. She concluded by emphasising the importance of continued cooperation between policymakers, social security institutions and civil society organisations to translate policy objectives into tangible improvements in people's lives.