



ESIP Public Workshop

Brussels, 26 March 2025

*"Pensions for the future:
The role of Social Security in
long-term sustainability & trust"*

Workshop report



On March 26, 2025, the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) hosted a public workshop in Brussels titled "*Pensions for the Future: The Role of Social Security in Long-term Sustainability & Trust*". The event convened policymakers, economists, and experts to discuss the evolving role of social security systems in aiding decision-makers to formulate evidence-based policies and cultivate public trust through effective communication. Social security organisations, leveraging their extensive expertise in data collection, monitoring, and forecasting, can facilitate the crafting of well-designed, long-term policies that enhance system resilience and alleviate the effects of unforeseen crises.

The half-a-day workshop gathered 70 participants and covered both the question of policies supporting long-term sustainability of pension systems and citizens' trust towards the system itself.

Please visit the [Workshop event page](#) on the [ESIP website](#) for all relevant information, including for the [slides](#) which were presented during the event.

Programme

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

Video-recorded Keynote Speech (09:00)

Prof. Sebastian GAJEWSKI, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Poland

From data collection to forecast: How Social Security supports decision-makers (09:10)

- Francesco CORTI, Member of Cabinet, Executive Vice-President & European Commissioner for Social Rights & Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness Roxana Mînzatu
- Prof. Camille LOGEAY, Researcher & Professor of Economics, Berlin University of Applied Sciences (HTW)
- Tuija NOPOLA, Mathematician, Population Projections, Finnish Centre for Pensions (ETK)

Transparency: The pathway to trustworthy systems (10:20)

- Dr Bart VAN RIEL, Senior policy officer, Dutch Social Economic Council
- Maciej LIS, Economist, Social Policy Division, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD
- Robert MARCZAK, Head of the Science Promotion Section in the President's Office, Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), Poland
- Joël BOULANGER, Policy officer for Pension Adequacy, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

About the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

The European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) represents 48 national statutory social insurance organisations in 18 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.

Prof. Sebastian Gajewski's keynote speech

Prof. Sebastian Gajewski (Deputy Minister, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Poland) emphasised during his keynote speech the pressing necessity to tackle the challenges facing pension systems amidst demographic and economic changes. He underscored that the long-term sustainability of pensions



must be reconciled with adequacy, guaranteeing financial stability for the elderly. He noted that a primary focus of the ongoing Polish Presidency of the EU, is addressing the “silver transformation” by advocating for policies that facilitate dignified ageing and promote the sustained employment of elderly people. Prof. Gajewski explained that extending labour participation is essential for ensuring the financial sustainability of pension systems. He also argued that elevating the retirement age should not be viewed as a panacea, highlighting the potential for unanticipated expenses, including greater dependence on disability pensions and unemployment benefits.

“The professional activity of older people represents both a significant opportunity and an asset for pension adequacy” (Prof. Gajewski)

The Polish Deputy Minister proposed state-sponsored incentives to motivate elderly workers to voluntarily continue participating in the labour market. He outlined Poland's strategy, which encompasses permitting the combination of entire pension benefits with employment, providing tax advantages for seniors, and co-financing salaries for the elderly. He finally remarked that although each Member State can tailor its policies to its specific pension framework, the overarching European debate should acknowledge the significant contribution of senior workers to sustaining pension systems.

From Data Collection to Forecast – How Social Security Supports Decision-Makers

Prof. Camille Logeay (Researcher & Professor of Economics, Berlin University of Applied Sciences, HTW) kicked off the first panel discussion over the formulation of her model for Germany's public pension system, intended as an open-source instrument for stakeholders to simulate and assess policy effects. Funded by the trade unions' foundation and discussed with the German pension insurance, the concept facilitates debates in public pension. The first simulation for a pension initiative of a trade union was finalised in September 2024. Consultation dialogues with the Germany's public pension institutions resulted in additional improvements. As Prof. Logeay explained, her simulation model evaluates financial and social sustainability metrics, encompassing contribution rates, tax subsidies, replacement rates, and all aggregated financial measures. In particular, a second simulation was made to evaluate the 2024 pension reform, which failed to pass in the meantime.

“When academia meets with pension insurance and decision-makers, the debate cools down and becomes more objective as when we exchange through newspapers.” (Prof. Logeay)

The discussion on the reform centred on intergenerational fairness and sustainability, with simulations indicating that no generation would face losses. Notwithstanding political tensions unrelated to pensions, the model impacted the debate, especially in academic and policy-making spheres. Prof. Logeay underscored the significance of impartial, fact-driven communication between academia and pension organisations to promote objective exchanges.

Tuija Nopola (Mathematician, Population Projections, Finnish Centre for Pensions, ETK) complemented Prof. Logeay's perspective with a mathematical analysis of Finland's pension system, emphasising long-term forecasts and recent changes. The Finnish system, predominantly financed by employers, depends on labour market organisations to negotiate contribution rates and implement reforms. A significant change in June 2023 sought to enhance government finances by 0.4% of GDP without altering benefits nor the retirement age, focussing instead on modifying investment strategies. The reform implemented an inflation stabilisation mechanism to ensure that pension indexation does not surpass wage growth. She presented stochastic forecasts evaluating the effects of assuming greater investment risk to achieve elevated returns. Nopola stated that the political negotiations were predominantly confidential, with only a few professionals analysing

"The (Finnish pension) reform is not so hard for people, as there is no decrease of benefit nor increase of contributions, it's mainly focusing on return to investment reform." (T. Nopola)

various facets. Despite reservations over the sustainability of future pensions, Finland continues to uphold transparency via quarterly reports and public pension calculators, thereby assisting citizens in learning about their retirement prospects.

The panel also featured **Francesco Corti**, member of Cabinet, Executive Vice-President & European Commissioner for Social Rights & Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness Roxana Mînzatu. He articulated a forward-looking framework of the European Commission's plan for the digitalisation of social security, highlighting improved labour mobility, system sustainability, and cross-border collaboration.

At the core of this approach is the creation of interoperable digital instruments, including the European pension tracking system (which is created in conjunction with 17 member states and anticipated by 2029), the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI), and the upcoming EU-wide European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS). These projects seek to address concerns over the fragmentation and inconsistency in digital policies at the EU level and to minimise administrative burden, standardise data sharing, and facilitate seamless mobility for EU citizens by guaranteeing rapid, accurate, and safe access to their social security rights and pension status. Corti emphasised the forthcoming Labour Mobility Package, which will prioritise digitalisation and enhance efforts to combat fraud while improving controls, all without compromising the existing national systems of Member States.

"Next to pension sustainability and adequacy perspectives, the Commission also looks on pension from a key new perspective, namely a mobile perspective." (F. Corti)

Additionally, he pointed out the necessity of consistency among EU policies and institutions, the preservation of national digital infrastructure investments, and the objective to enable real-time, automated information exchanges between Member States, particularly concerning unemployment benefits and public employment services. It underlines a pragmatic, collaborative strategy that acknowledges Member States' contributions while pursuing compromise for the enhancement of best practices, such as the ZUS' PDA¹ verification tool or bilateral initiatives like Franco-Italian cooperation. Corti also addressed the increasing use of data and models—created by academic and independent organisations—in formulating evidence-based policy and assessing the financial viability of pension reforms. According to Corti, the European Commission ultimately would envision a modern, digital, and reliable social security system that accommodates mobile workers and enhances EU integration.



A shared element across the three interventions was the focus on evidence-based policymaking to improve efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Experts remarked that standardised, high-quality data reporting and exchange can enhance pension adequacy evaluations, improve contribution tracking, and enable real-time decision-making for (mobile) workers. The utilisation of digital solutions such as EESSI and ESSPASS is frequently cited as a means to enhance

administrative efficiency, mitigate fraud and errors, and ensure increased transparency in pension entitlements. A data-driven approach is essential for ensuring long-term financial stability, enabling policymakers to evaluate future demographic changes and adjust pension schemes, accordingly, thus balancing social protection with economic viability.

Transparency – The Pathway to Trustworthy Systems

Robert Marczak (Head of the Science Promotion Section at the ZUS President's Office) represented the Polish Social Security Institution and ESIP member, ZUS, on the panel. He outlined his institution's responsibility in educating individuals, particularly younger people, about social insurance and its importance to society. He presented various projects, including a seminar focused on the internal incentives or obstacles within society regarding the utilisation of social security benefits. Marczak emphasized that the system's acceptance depends on public comprehension, which oftentimes requires the overcoming of negative preconceived notions. ZUS prioritises educational outreach, beginning with young children and extending to university-level initiatives, featuring programs like "Lessons with ZUS" and an Olympiad focused on social insurance knowledge. The Polish institution further administers surveys to enhance knowledge of young people's perceptions of social risks. ZUS is enhancing communication techniques and offering resources such as pension calculators to facilitate public comprehension and engagement with the social insurance system. Marczak pointed out the necessity of informing legislators and the public about the long-term viability of the pension system, which depends on contributions and demographic factors.

"The task of ensuring people's knowledge is written in our act of social insurance scheme, and we are probably the only institution responsible for offering education on social security" (R. Marczak)

Dr. Bart Van Riel (Senior policy officer, Dutch Social Economic Council, SER), on the other hand, shared insights regarding the pension reform process in the Netherlands from 2014 to 2023. SER, a tripartite entity including social partners and independent nominated experts, was commissioned by the government to provide advice on pension reform. The fundamental objective was to shift from a hybrid Defined Benefits/Defined Contributions pension system to a more sustainable model, enhancing equity for younger generations and tackling the retirement age challenge. The procedure encompassed comprehensive discussions, reports, and public consultations. The reform was formulated in several phases. It began with a comprehensive advisory report which came about following numerous meetings and rounds of consultation with stakeholders. Key challenges encompassed maintaining generational equity, specifically in rewarding older generations while guaranteeing fairness for younger employees. Despite these obstacles, the reform, which aligned almost entirely with the SER recommendations, was ultimately ratified by Parliament in July 2023. Nevertheless, Dr. Van Riel underscored the significance of continuous talk and communication to foster trust and secure continuous societal support to the reform.

"One of the reasons we started all this was because there were worries about the trust among younger generations. Younger generations did not believe that for every euro they got in, they got more Euro out, which was nonsense. That was the reason we wanted to reform the pension system and make it fairer, building trust among the youth." (Dr. Van Riel)

Following the Polish and Dutch experiences, **Maciej Lis** (Economist, Social Policy Division, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD) presented the main findings of the "[OECD Risks that Matter Survey](#)" conducted across 27 countries, emphasizing individuals' perceptions of their social risks, including those associated with old age. The study examines the variances in perceptions of these risks across countries and evaluates the existing social security systems about their efficacy in mitigating those risks. The primary finding indicates that income security in old age is the foremost issue in the majority of countries. A substantial segment of the population perceives that they do not obtain a just share of public benefits comparable with their contributions, hence exacerbating distrust in public institutions.

Nevertheless, many would consent to more taxation in exchange for enhanced advantages, especially for financial security in old age. Lis underlined the significance of communication in fostering trust in social security systems, stressing the necessity for clear, targeted messages, particularly at crucial periods in life, such as entering the labour market, prior to or during career interruptions, and approaching retirement age. Furthermore, the OECD report tackles emerging risks, like career pauses for nontraditional reasons, and the difficulties of adjusting social security systems to these evolving circumstances.

"One of the key findings from the survey is that around four in 10 people feel that they do not receive the fair share of public benefits compared to the taxes they paid. This perception of not receiving enough compared to what we are paying in is quite common across countries, and only 1/3 think they receive the fair share." (M. Lis)

To foster trust in the system, transparency and accurate information appear essential. **Joël Boulanger** (Policy Officer for Pension Adequacy, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission) analysed the European Commission's contribution to improving the transparency of pension systems throughout EU Member States via various initiatives. The Pension Adequacy report, issued triennially, and the annually updated Pension Adequacy Benchmarking Framework, which evaluates pension systems using diverse measures, are essential components. The Commission provides extensive data about pension systems on the Mutual Information System on Social Protection (MISSOC) website for policymakers and academics and simplified Social Security guides on the europa.eu website to improve accessibility for citizens. A primary endeavour is the establishment of the European Pension Tracking System (ETS), enabling citizens to access their pension benefits across several Member States through a centralised online

"I am convinced that the pension tracking system is part of the solution, as we hear that people fear that they won't get any pension when they will retire. There is an issue of trust, and I think there is a lot of work to do." (J. Boulanger)

platform. The ETS seeks to nurture trust and transparency by offering individuals an accurate overview of their anticipated pension income, enhancing labour mobility, and mitigating apprehensions regarding the reliability of pension systems.

Overall, speakers examined the relevance of trust and transparency in pension systems, especially regarding reform and the difficulties of disseminating complex pension information to the public. The conversation drew the attention to the benefits of transparency, good communication, and reliable information for safeguarding public trust in social security institutions and for presenting pension reforms clearly. The national and European pension tracking systems, as referenced in multiple cases, emerges as a crucial instrument for enhancing transparency, allowing individuals to learn about their prospective pension benefits across various Member States. These exchanges highlight the necessity of addressing public concerns over fairness and reliability to guarantee the effectiveness of pension policies.



Conclusion

The workshop highlighted the necessity of addressing the issues faced by pension systems, especially regarding transparency, trust, and adequacy. Citizens express concerns regarding the equity and accessibility of social security systems, underscoring the necessity for coherent communication and transparent, data-driven policy frameworks to establish trust and accountability. The European Commission's pension adequacy assessments and the establishment of pension tracking systems are steps forward in promoting the awareness of pension benefits and guaranteeing that pension systems can adjust to demographic and economic shifts. The reforms, rooted in the analysis and forecast of academic institutions and social security organisations, are crucial for establishing more resilient and equitable systems that citizens can depend on, thereby assuring long-term financial sustainability and enhancing trust in public institutions.