EUROPEAN SOCIAL INSURANCE PLATFORM

Social security is key to Europe's growth and competitiveness

CEOs of statutory social security institutions from across Europe reaffirmed on 15 October 2025 at the 4th Annual Forum of the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) in Brussels, that strong, inclusive, and financially sustainable social protection systems are a pillar of European solidarity and a decisive factor for growth, stability, and competitiveness. At the same time, they recognised the growing challenges facing social security institutions, namely balancing rising expectations from citizens, employers, and policymakers while operating with limited resources and staff. To enable the necessary reforms and innovations, they underlined the need for adequate and sustainable resourcing.

Social protection is at the heart of a resilient, fair, and competitive Union

Europe is confronted with demographic change, digitalisation, labour market transformation, climate pressures, and growing geopolitical uncertainties. It is important for ESIP to emphasise once again that social protection systems provide an anchor of stability and confidence for European citizens, not least during turbulent times like these. They are an investment in Europe's people and its capacity to prosper. They reinforce resilience and secure Europe's strategic edge.

At the 4th Annual Forum in Brussels, social security leaders emphasised that mobility — across borders and careers — must be supported by coordinated social protection frameworks. The Single Market needs enabled social security systems that preserve the portability of rights even as work patterns evolve. These systems are not static structures; they must adapt to modern labour and social dynamics.

Social security protects against existential risks across the life course, including illness, unemployment, parenthood, the need for long-term care, old age, and reduced earning capacity, as well as the consequences of occupational accidents and occupational diseases. The ageing of the European population, combined with technological and ecological transitions is putting pressure on public finances and on the social protection systems. We must strike the right balance: securing long-term sustainability while protecting inclusion and quality. Only in this way can Europe safeguard its social model and continue to compete globally on the basis of both innovation and fairness.

Artificial Intelligence for social protection

In this context, digital innovation plays a key role. Artificial intelligence has the potential to make Europe's social protection systems more effective, fair, and competitive. Applied responsibly, AI can help reduce fraud, ensure benefits are calculated correctly, and support people in claiming the rights they are entitled to - strengthening trust in public institutions and ensuring fairness. At the same time, rules on AI must strike a balance: they should embed strong safeguards against discrimination and environmental harm while remaining proportionate and workable for public bodies without overburdening them. Investment in AI should be directed towards projects that serve the public interest, particularly in health and social security, where digital tools can deliver higher-quality, more accessible, and more efficient services. Reliable data is key - when combined with AI-supported analysis, it allows better targeting of resources, anticipatory action in labour market transitions, and more resilient systems overall.

Investing in welfare systems — investing in people

Strong social security systems are a foundation for sustainable growth. By reducing poverty, supporting labour market participation, and encouraging lifelong learning, they create the conditions for a productive and adaptable economy. While simplifying the EU budget framework is important, this must not come at the expense of sufficient and predictable funding for social and health priorities. Procurement and financing frameworks should ensure fair competition and avoid social dumping, while also fostering innovation, digitalisation, and cooperation between social security institutions. In the longer term, Europe should acknowledge the value of social investments alongside other types of investment within the economic governance processes, recognising its contribution to prosperity and competitiveness.

Sustainable healthcare systems

Health is both a social right and a driver of Europe's competitiveness. Accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare underpins productivity, resilience, and social cohesion. Strengthening the security of supply for critical medicines enhances Europe's health sovereignty but must go hand in hand with affordability and equitable access. Preventive measures - from healthy environment and better nutrition, structural prevention of tobacco and alcohol use, to mental health support - reduce long-term costs and sustain a resilient workforce. At the same time, EU-level cooperation should concentrate on creating a framework for financially viable health systems, improving health technology assessment, and addressing shortages of medicines and devices, while respecting national responsibilities. Initiatives such as the European Health Data Space offer opportunities to reduce inequalities and improve care, provided they are implemented transparently and with patient interests at their core. Long-term care also demands more coherent monitoring and clearer cross-border rules if Europe is to meet the needs of an ageing population.

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