



ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONFERENCE AND CALL FOR PAPERS

5th International Research Conference on Social Security

Warsaw, 5-7 March 2007

"Social security and the labour market: A mismatch?"

The role of social security in relation to the labour market and employment policies

Social security and the labour market seem to be increasingly at odds, apparently growing further and further apart. Both in the industrialized and the developing world, labour markets are becoming more competitive, flexible and informal. Social security is often incapable of keeping pace with these trends and effectively protecting individuals from the most severe effects of informal and precarious employment. What is more, corresponding to the argument that social security must not "stand in the way" of dynamic labour markets, social security provision is increasingly questioned, scaled back or at least refocused so as to serve labour market requirements. National social security systems are also often ill-equipped to deal with the increasing number of migrant workers who reflect the rising geographical mobility of labour and the internationalization of labour markets. In short, while in the present situation of ever more flexible and international labour markets new needs for social security arise, the ability of social security to meet such needs seems to decline.

How to bridge the growing divergence between social security and labour market realities? More explicitly, what role can and should social security play in the present labour market context? What policies hold out a promise for extending coverage to workers in the large informal economy in low- and middle-income countries? In emerging and advanced economies, how can social security respond to growing job insecurity, help individuals make job-to-job transitions and better protect workers in non-standard employment? How can the structure of social security systems be redesigned so as to provide adequate protection, while at the same time contributing to improved labour market outcomes? Under what conditions can the perceived trade-off between social security and labour market flexibility be reconciled, or even transformed into a mutually supportive relationship? And what can social security do to better adapt to the special needs of the increasing number of migrant workers?

The **5th International Research Conference on Social Security**, to be held from 5 to 7 March 2007 in Warsaw, Poland, at the invitation of the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), will address these crucial questions (see topics below). The Conference, organized as part of the

International Social Security Association's Policy and Research Programme, has several objectives. In bringing together researchers, policy makers, administrators and other members of the social security community, it will provide a platform for discussing the best ways of adapting social security to current and future labour market trends. In this way, the Conference will help **to inform and enlighten the current policy debate, promote policy innovation and guide future research.** It follows up on the work of the 4th International Research Conference on Social Security, held in May 2003 in Antwerp, Belgium. That Conference examined the challenges for social security in a long-life society.

Topics of the Conference and research questions

The overall picture: Flexible labour markets and the role of social security

In a globalized world economy, labour markets need to be highly adaptable. Worldwide, this requirement translates into declining job stability and a rise in informal-economy and non-standard employment. But are these unavoidable consequences of the need for flexibility? What exactly is labour market flexibility about and what demands does it make? What skills, capacities and motivations do dynamic labour markets require from individuals and how does this affect job profiles, the nature of work and types of employment? What institutional structures provide for the necessary degree of labour market adaptability? What level of labour supply do labour markets around the world need, now and in the near future? In ageing societies, to what extent is it necessary to increase the supply of labour, either through increased labour force participation or migrant workers? The trend towards flexible and insecure labour markets challenges the role and adequacy of social security. What role can and should social security fulfil in the present labour market context and by which means can it achieve its objectives? What new needs for social security arise? How can we ensure that social security itself becomes more flexible so as to be better prepared for unknown future challenges? How can and does social security contribute to economic demands (e.g. productivity, labour mobility, employment growth, international competitiveness) and societal demands (e.g. poverty alleviation, reduction of social inequality, social cohesion and participation, political stability)? What implications do present labour market conditions have for the funding of social security? How should the functions of social security in future be allocated between the public and private sectors?

The coverage gap: Informal labour markets in the developing world

Contrary to the expectation that the formal sector would gradually absorb the vast majority of the workforce in low- and middle-income countries, formal employment has actually shrunk over the past years. Thus, the informal economy, including self-employed persons, workers in small-scale businesses, home, casual and unpaid family labour as well as rural workers and farmers, still accounts for the lion's share of employment in the developing world. With statutory social insurance being linked to formal employment and alternative systems of social protection being rare, the vast majority of the population in these countries lacks any form of coverage. In recent years, different strategies to improve coverage have been put into practice, including bringing new groups into statutory social insurance systems, setting up separate public schemes for informal-sector workers, promoting community-based arrangements (e.g. micro-insurance schemes) and providing universal or means-tested, tax-funded benefits to vulnerable groups. What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of alternative approaches to extending social security? What challenges arise in designing, managing and financing schemes to cover the informal economy? What can we learn from countries that have followed different pathways, or from past instances of success and failure? How can the various formal and informal mechanisms for providing social security be integrated?

Reconciling social security and labour market flexibility

In emerging and advanced economies, labour market flexibility manifests itself in the growth of non-standard employment, such as self-employment, temporary, part-time and agency-dispatched work, and greater job insecurity, translating into higher risks of skill obsolescence, recurring periods of unemployment and incomplete social security coverage. To address these risks, a range of innovative policies are being discussed at present. Many of them relate to the concept of “transitional labour markets”; others refer to the ongoing debate about “flexicurity”. How can social security better protect workers in non-standard employment? What potential do innovations based on the idea of “transitional labour markets” and other new forms of social security have for helping individuals cope in flexible labour markets? What forms of income support are necessary in view of precarious employment? Under what conditions does flexicurity offer a promising road towards reconciling economic adaptability and social security? Labour migration contributes to the flexibility of labour markets in advanced and emerging economies. But at the same time, migrant workers pose considerable challenges to social security as they are at risk of lack of coverage or inappropriate double coverage and often experience disadvantages because of benefit entitlement conditions. Moreover, the sizeable group of migrant workers in Western and some Near Eastern countries who work in menial, hazardous and low-paid jobs are especially affected by employment precariousness, resulting in higher risks of unemployment, incomplete social security coverage or having to rely on social assistance. What adaptations of national social security systems are required in order to minimize disadvantages for migrant workers? What specific services and benefits does the most vulnerable group of migrant workers, those in hazardous jobs, need?

The prevailing focus on work: Making social security more employment-friendly

For several years now, there has been a dominant trend towards reshaping social security so as to make it contribute to better labour market outcomes, especially higher employment levels. Countless policy reforms have been implemented to this end, intended to reduce work disincentives that may be contained in social security schemes, refocus social security on improving employability, and change the behaviour of employers, administrators and service providers to enhance the labour market (re)integration of those who are not employed. Activating long-term unemployed workers and social assistance recipients, helping young people make the transition from education to work, encouraging older workers to stay in the workforce longer and promoting the labour force participation of people with disabilities fall into this category of efforts. Given ample policy interventions, the time is ripe now for a systematic evaluation of which approaches work and under what conditions. What policies succeed in retaining those able to work in the labour market? What policies prove effective in facilitating the labour market re-entry of those who have left the world of work? To what extent does the reality of unemployment undermine the efforts of employment creation, now and in future? What other positive effects does social security have on labour market outcomes? Does the emphasis on work in social security have undesirable side effects and, if so, how can these be minimized?

The labour market of the future: Policy challenges for social security

In order to bridge the growing divergence between social security and labour market realities, it is paramount to anticipate how labour markets throughout the world will evolve in the near future. Besides flexibilization, informalization and internationalization, other labour market trends will also likely affect the role, adequacy and sustainability of social security. They will result from present demographic (e.g. population ageing; the HIV/AIDS pandemic), economic (e.g. globalization; the digital revolution; predominance of the service economy) and other trends. Taking these trends into account, what are likely scenarios for the future development of labour markets? What policy challenges will emerge for social security in the labour market of the future? And how can future research, at the interface of labour markets and social security, contribute to dealing with these challenges? In particular, how can we ensure that the expertise of both social security specialists and labour economists is combined to prepare social security for future policy issues?

The Conference will be essentially forward-looking; the maximum amount of time will be devoted to discussion during both plenary and concurrent sessions. A limited number of keynote addresses will be organized with a view to clarifying the major issues and setting the framework for discussion. The plenary sessions, and one of each set of concurrent sessions, will be interpreted in **English, French, German and Spanish**.

The ISSA encourages anyone interested in proposing a paper to submit the title of the paper, together with a short outline, by **31 July 2006**. You can either complete the attached form or fill in the online form at **www.issa.int**. Contributions should relate to the general theme or one of the specific topics as presented above and should refer to recent or current research activity, in particular to evaluations of innovative policies or programmes. Contributions relating to comparative research and reports of studies with a direct bearing on the functioning of social security systems are particularly welcome.

A Scientific Committee (see below) will be responsible for the selection of papers to be presented at the Conference. There will also be an opportunity for some papers to be presented as posters during separate poster sessions. The selected papers will be available to the Conference participants in the original language only. All papers relating to the Conference will be accessible at the Conference website (www.issa.int). The Scientific Committee will inform those who have submitted a paper proposal whether or not their paper has been selected shortly after the deadline of 31 July. The papers selected should then reach the ISSA General Secretariat no later than **30 November 2006**.

An invitation to the Conference, together with a detailed programme, will be sent in mid-September 2006 to each person who has expressed an interest in taking part. To do so, please return the attached form or fill in the online form (www.issa.int).

As the ISSA is not in a position to meet the travel and subsistence costs of attendance at its meetings, participants and contributors will be expected to find the means of meeting these costs themselves. A contribution towards the costs of the Conference (covering, among other things, lunches and conference documentation) of CHF250 (approx. EUR160 or USD200) will be charged to all participants. For graduate students, there will be a limited number of places at a reduced registration fee. A limited number of attendance grants will be available to younger researchers from low- and middle-income countries who present a paper at the Conference. For more information, see the Conference webpage (www.issa.int).

Scientific Committee of the Conference

Jean-Claude Barbier, University of Paris I (France); Nicholas Barr, London School of Economics and Politics (UK); Neil Gilbert, University of California, Berkeley (USA); Bjørn Hvinden, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Norway); Edwin Kaseke, University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe); Huck-ju Kwon, Sung Kyun Kwan University (Republic of Korea); Francie Lund, University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa); Per Kongshøj Madsen, University of Aalborg (Denmark); Carmelo Mesa-Lago, University of Pittsburgh (USA); Sara E. Rix, AARP Public Policy Institute (USA); Zofia Rutkowska, Social Insurance Institution (Poland); Ton Wilthagen, Tilburg University (Netherlands); Maciej Zukowski, University of Economics, Poznan (Poland); Roland Sigg, ISSA General Secretariat

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