



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 13 October 2021
(OR. en)

12703/21

SOC 580
EMPL 426

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) and European
Social Security Pass (ESS PASS) projects
Information from the Commission on the state of play

Delegations will find attached the information note from the Commission on the above subject, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 15 October 2021 (Any Other Business item).

State of play of the EESSI and ESSPASS projects

This note presents the state of play and way forward concerning the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) IT system and the European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS) pilot project.

EU rules on social security coordination call on the Member States to use digital technologies for the exchange, access and processing of the data required for the application of these rules as well as to offer user-friendly services to citizens enjoying their right to free movement across Europe. Investments in these services are instrumental in improving public sector efficiency and they respond to evolving citizens' needs and requests for faster, efficient paperless interactions with administrations. This is in line with the objectives of Europe's Digital Decade that sets out the objectives and measures to support the digital transformation of public administrations, to achieve cross-border interoperability and to facilitate the interaction with citizens.

The Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)

The Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) is an IT system that helps social security institutions across the EU exchange information more rapidly and securely, replacing paper-based exchanges, as required by the EU legislation on social security coordination. 32 European countries participate in EESSI (EU27, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). Work in EESSI started in 2008.

The Commission provided the EESSI software components to participating countries in July 2017, which Member States have committed to implementing by July 2019. The national implementation is currently still ongoing, only 9 countries have fully implemented the system to date. Since the first exchanges between Member States within the EESSI system (which took place in January 2019), the number of cases handled through EESSI has been rising: as of October 2021, around 3,000 institutions have been exchanging more than 12 million electronic messages. The Commission has been closely monitoring the progress of national implementation, supporting Member States in their endeavour, and providing regular updates to the software.

The development of EESSI and the RINA handover

The development of a national application for the institutions connecting to EESSI falls within the national domain of each participating country. The Commission provided a Reference Implementation for a National Application (RINA) software to temporarily help those countries, which had not yet developed their own national applications to start their implementation of EESSI.

As for all similar large scale IT projects supported by the Commission, the development and maintenance of a national application is the responsibility of each Member State, who are in charge of managing their own part of the data processing system, in line with subsidiarity considerations and Article 78 of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on social security coordination¹. It is simply not feasible for the EU to continue being responsible for each and every national application and the continuous updates that are triggered by changes in national rules.

EU funding for RINA started in 2014 and is continuing until this day representing around half of the total EU funding for EESSI up to now (i.e. around 50 million euros for a total budget of over 100 million euros).

Based on a comprehensive technical analysis by its IT services and in order to ensure the long-term viability of EESSI, the Commission announced during a high-level meeting on social security coordination in January 2020 the gradual handover of the RINA development, maintenance, training and support to the participating countries. Since the announcement of this decision, the Commission actively supported experts from the Member States in the analysis of the organisational, legal, technical and financial impact of the handover.

¹ REGULATION (EC) No 883/2004 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security system

The Commission provided for free the last update of RINA in December 2020, which Member States and their institutions have been deploying in the course of 2021 and will be able to continue using after the handover. The support period for this release was initially planned until the end of July 2021 and has been extended by the Commission until 31 December 2021. Member States were informed in March 2021 that an extension of the RINA support beyond this date will not be possible given budgetary and technical constraints. At the same time, the Commission will continue to develop, support and finance the central components of EESSI (the Central Service Node and the Common Data Model composed of the Business Use Cases and the Structured Electronic Documents), and its Access Points.

The Commission is closely monitoring and reporting on the progress of the handover and invites the countries to accelerate their implementation and their contracting procedures to ensure a proper functioning of the EESSI system for the benefit of all participating institutions and the European citizens, and urges Member States to swiftly finalise their national implementation.

The European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS) pilot project

While EESSI will facilitate the cross-border exchanges between social security institutions, the citizens' interactions with institutions and other actors for social security coordination purposes still entail cumbersome and often paper-based procedures. The Commission announced in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan the launch of a pilot project in 2021 called 'European Social Security Pass'. This will explore by 2023 the feasibility of a digital solution to facilitate the interaction between mobile citizens and national authorities, to improve the portability of social security rights across borders.

The pilot was launched in March 2021, together with the Italian Social Security Institution “Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale” (INPS). In the first phase, the focus is on digitalising the social security coordination procedures related to the Portable Document A1 – which states which legislation applies to the holder. The exact technical features of the solution to be tested in this pilot are in the process of being defined, the aim is to build on the proposed framework for a European Digital Identity (EU eID), as well as on the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI) and the Single Digital Gateway (SDG) Regulation.

In addition to Italy (and INPS), representatives from 12 other Member States expressed an interest in the pilot project, however to date there has been no confirmed volunteer to take part in the design and testing of the solution. The experience of designing and managing IT systems in the social security coordination field has demonstrated that proper piloting is necessary to identify at an early stage technical, organisational and legal constraints that would hinder a potential future large-scale deployment and ensure the interest and commitment of the Member States to invest in the project before substantial EU resources are committed. The early involvement and active participation of the Member States are also instrumental in better assessing national specificities, capacities and constraints. It would therefore be beneficial if other countries joined in the shaping and technical testing of the European Social Security Pass pilot.