

## Short interview with Marleen Calebout, SIIS Belgium

1. You have been working for the Social Information and Investigation Service (SIIS) which is part of the labour inspection system in Belgium for many years now. How has the work approach of the social and labour inspection system changed compared to ten years ago?

The SIIS was established in 2006 (program law) and has a legal basis. It was the replacement of the Federal Council and Coordination Committee for the Fight against Illegal Employment and Social Fraud.

In 2016, the Council of Ministers decided on the reform of social inspection services and the strengthening of the SIIS. In doing so, the structures were again thoroughly modified in 2018.

Before 2006, there was a coordinated cooperation between the several social inspection services, but this cooperation depended mostly on the initiative of the individual inspectors contacting each other to cooperate on a field inspection. There was a sort of cooperation within the districts, but without a legal basis. Since 2006 the cooperation is more structured.

There is a bi-annual Social Fraud Action Plan, approved by the Council of Ministers. This plan is a concretization of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and is the result of an active and constructive contribution from various federal and regional inspectorates and institutions (also see answer to question 2)

It is structured around 7 strategic objectives and includes a whole range of actions to combat fraud in social dumping, social contributions and social benefits in order to ensure the financing of social security.

Core elements of the plan include program operation to combat social fraud, increased attention to working conditions and well-being at work, intensive cooperation, the intervention mix with attention to all phases of the enforcement chain and capacity-building.

Within the SIIS there exist district cells, which meet every month to evaluate multidisciplinary actions and prepare upcoming ones, following this operational action plan. This district cell consists of representatives of several federal social inspection services, and sometimes also of the regional social inspection services, police services, tax services, etc., if needed.

The SIIS reports on 3 different pillars:

- strategic indicators or KPI (key performance indicators)
- the operational plan and its operational indicators
- revenues from the struggle against social fraud

The results are the outcomes of those multidisciplinary actions and can only be achieved by a thorough cooperation between Belgian social inspection services.

On an international level Belgium supports, both politically and operationally, the development of the European Labour Authority (ELA).

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ELA contributes to the joint fight against cross-border social fraud by the labour and social inspection services of the various member states. The 'best practices' that exist at the national and BENELUX level regarding joint inspections and data exchange must also be followed up at the European level in this context. The SIIS and the social inspectorates participate actively in the various activities and actions of the Undeclared Work (UDW) Platform, in which the Belgian inspectorates are often regarded as a point of reference and best practice within Europe. The UDW platform will eventually become part of the ELA.

ELA facilitates Concerted and Joint Inspections, where social inspectorates from multiple member states work together.

### 2. Could you give us a brief overview on the 4-year strategic plan which is the foundation of the work of the Belgian social and labour inspection today? How does it relate to the 2-year action plan that you work with?

The strategic plan sets the strategic reference and policy framework for combating social fraud and social dumping for a period of 4 years. Scientific foundation, some program management and cooperation are the key concepts throughout the plan.

The plan includes following strategic objectives:

1. Reducing social fraud and social dumping by strengthening European and international cooperation.
2. Ensuring the competitiveness of our companies and thereby guaranteeing fair competition.
3. Creating an inclusive labour market that guarantees occupational safety and health for all workers.
4. Strengthening the inspection services to ensure greater capacity to act and strength.
5. Simplify administration (including digitization), legislation and improve information to increase transparency, prevent unintentional irregularities and combat social engineering.
6. Increasing the risk of getting caught and improving the effectiveness of sanctions.
7. Preventing social fraud.

To achieve these objectives, efforts will be made in all phases of the enforcement chain, namely:

- Prevention
- Detection
- Control
- Sanctioning
- recovery of social security contributions or unlawfully paid social benefits

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The strategic objectives are translated into the bi-annual operational action plans and thus into concrete operational objectives and actions by linking them to the following fraud phenomena and policy priorities:

1. Fight against social dumping
2. Fight against undeclared labour
3. Fight against contribution fraud
4. Fight against benefit fraud
5. Fight against human trafficking and economic exploitation
6. An inclusive labour market that ensures occupational safety and health for all workers

These policy priorities are also based on the risk assessment.

The operational action plan includes:

- the individual control actions for each inspectorate/institution
- the joint inspection activities
- new policy and operational actions

The Operational Plan consists of a set of (policy) actions aimed at achieving the strategic objectives set out in the strategic plan of the Belgian Government. (91 actions)

### 3. How important is data and the exchange of data between different parts of the social and labour inspection system for implementing these plans? Which role does digitalization play?

Efficient social fraud control also means making effective use of data mining/data matching.

We live in an era of big data, not connecting and analysing it would be a missed opportunity. Data matching, where two sets of data are compared and data mining where targeted search for connections between different data sets with the aim of developing new profiles, have become indispensable in society. Social inspectorates also fully commit to deploy within the enforcement chain on detection of new fraud phenomena and/or to make their existing controls easier in order to be able to steer their existing inspections more easily. Data mining is central to the Risk Management of the future.

These techniques of data mining and data matching will be employed while respecting privacy legislation. Care will also be taken to avoid blind use of these techniques so that undesired effects of profiling are avoided.

Abuses should be better identified through a disclosure and linking of the available databases. Further efforts should be made to cross data in certain sectors, and/or between services (e.g., social and fiscal) or between policy levels (federal and regional).

The possibilities of artificial intelligence will be further explored in the future, while respecting privacy laws.

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The Belgian Government remains committed to further digitalization and improving the data exchange, not only between the social inspection services, but also with other public services and towards enterprises and the public in general (only once principle).

The Belgian Government will further invest in the professionalization and modernization (digitalization) of the social inspection services. Sufficient support and strengthening of the social inspection services, both in terms of tools, and in terms of data exchange, is the goal.

An example of this digitalization is the development of an application called: My DiA (or in full: my digital assistant)

MyDIA is a mobile application developed by the federal social security inspection services to make their field inspections more streamlined and efficient. The app provides inspectors with real-time access to social security and national register databases via their smartphones, ensuring that they always have the latest declaration data at their disposal. It also provides an overview of inspectors participating in inspection assignments and information on who has inspected whom. MyDIA is available since 2021.

The biggest innovation lies in the fact that MyDIA makes authentic government data available on a mobile device, allowing inspectors to quickly and easily access databases even in physically difficult or chaotic survey situations, such as construction sites. The application also promotes collaboration between inspectors from different departments and levels of government. MyDIA has made the work of social inspection agencies more efficient and faster and is used by almost 1000 social inspectors from 5 different organizations.

***Marleen Calebout** has been a social inspector in Belgium for almost 22 years. She has 15 years of professional experience with economic and social security fraud related to human trafficking and 5 ½ years of experience with bogus self-employment. Since March 2023, she has been a coordinator at the Social Information and investigating service of the Belgian Labour Inspectorate. In this role, she participates in coordination meetings for multidisciplinary inspections and works with her colleagues to develop methodological approaches for inspections and investigations. She is also responsible for the training centre, which aims to provide standardized training courses on all topics relevant to the social and labour inspectorate. She has been attending several peer learning dialogue-sessions at ELA (European Labor Authority) on cross-border employment and undeclared work among EU-workers and third country nationals.*