

E-Government Program of the Belgian Social Security

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INTRODUCTION

The Belgian social security consists on the one hand of three insurance systems (workers, self-employed workers, and civil servants), that cover a maximum of seven social risks (incapacity for work, industrial accident, occupational disease, unemployment, old age, child care and holiday pay—the so-called branches of social security), and on the other hand of four assistance systems (subsidies for the handicapped, guaranteed family allowance, minimum income, and income guarantee for the elderly), that grant people specific minimum services after checking their subsistence resources. In addition, a lot of public institutions at the national, regional or local level, or private companies entrusted with missions of general interest (e.g., energy, water, or public transport companies) grant benefits (e.g. tax or price reductions, free passes for public transport, etc.) to citizens based on their social security status.

In total, about 2,000 actors are responsible for the provision of social security and social protection in Belgium. More than 10 million citizens and 230,000 employers have very frequent contacts with those actors to claim their entitlements, provide information and pay their contributions.

BACKGROUND

In the mid-1980s, an in-depth analysis of the functioning of social security proved that (Robben & Deprest, 2003):

- The organization of social security offices' business processes was not very customer-oriented and was certainly not coordinated among the various offices.
- Each social security office had its own set of paper forms with accompanying instructions, on the basis of which information was requested that was specifically necessary to calculate the particular contributions or grant the entitlements in the light of the particular social risk; in total some 80 different paper forms were used for data exchange between citizens and employers on the one hand and social security offices on the other with a total of about 2,000 pages of instructions.
- No possibility existed for an interactive exchange of data between the citizens and employers on the one hand, and the social security offices on the other.
- A direct exchange of electronic data was also not possible between the personnel administration software of an employer and the information systems of the social security offices, which led to an unnecessary and error-prone manual re-input of information.
- Social security offices very often asked the citizens and their employers to request information that was already available at another social security office in the form of a paper document, and to produce that document, rather than exchanging the information directly among themselves.
- Citizens and their employers thus had to inform many social security offices of a single event, following different legal concepts and administrative instructions each time.
- Since the exchange of data occurred on paper, processing was expensive and time-consuming.
- Citizens and their employers themselves had to claim their entitlements throughout the social security system and could not count on the automatic granting of all entitlements on the basis of a single declaration.

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- Citizens and their employers did not have the necessary tools for checking the quality of the information before this was reported to the social security offices; this resulted in a relatively high percentage of errors and numerous subsequent contacts for the correction of errors, which could have been avoided.
- This all led to a very heavy administrative load and accompanying expenses for employers, which resulted in a brake on entrepreneurship, a smooth economic development, and growth in employment.

PRIORITIES AND PURPOSES

The overall goals of the e-government program of the Belgian social sector are:

- to grant effective and efficient services with a minimum of administrative formalities and costs for all involved;
- to improve and radically reorganize the service delivery processes amongst the actors in the social sector, and between those actors on the one hand and the citizens and the employers on the other hand;
- to promote information security and privacy protection by the actors so that all the involved actors, citizens and employers can have justified confidence in the system; and
- to deliver integrated statistical information to the politicians and the researchers in order to support the social policy.

STRATEGIC USE OF INFORMATION

Information is a prime production factor for most government bodies. Government revenues such as taxes and social security contributions depend on data about the income of citizens and company revenues; elections can only be held based on information about people residing within a country's borders; benefits and subsidies are granted taking information about the living circumstances of the duly authorized person and his/her direct environment into account, and so forth.

Thus, it is very important that all government bodies deal with information as a strategic resource. This implies effective and efficient treatment of information in compliance with basic data protection regulations, such as the Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of October 24, 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (Official Journal, 1995).

The e-government approach within the Belgian social security sector (<http://www.law.kuleuven.ac.be/icri/frobben>) is based on a clear vision of the use of information as a strategic resource:

- **Information Modeling:** Information is modeled in a coordinated way so that the model fits as closely as possible to the real world. By doing so, changes to the information model due to changing legal environments are avoided. This modeling takes into account as much as possible the expected use cases for the information. It can be extended and adapted flexibly when the real world or the use cases of information change.
- **Unique Collection and Reuse of Information:** Information is only collected by a social security institution for well-defined purposes and in a proportional way to these purposes. All information is collected only once, as closely as possible to the authentic source. This way of proceeding avoids the frequently repeated identical questioning of the citizens or the companies by several actors in the social sector. The collection occurs via a channel selected by the person from whom the information is collected, but preferably in an electronic way, using uniform services such as single sign on, notification of receipt for each message, and so forth. Information is collected according to the information model and on the basis of uniform administrative instructions operational for all actors in the social sector. Ideally, the supplier of information has the possibility of controlling the quality of information before its transmission to an actor in the social sector. This requires the public availability of software to check this quality. The collected information is validated once in compliance with an established distribution of tasks, by the most entitled institution or by the institution that has the most interest in a correct validation. Information is shared with and reused by the authorized users after the validation process.
- **Management of Information:** A functional task sharing is established indicating which institution stores and manages which kind of information in authentic form and makes it available to all authorized users. Information is stored in compliance with the information model. Information can be flexibly assembled according to ever changing legal concepts, which have to refer to the information model. Each institution has to report probable improprieties of information to the institution that is designated to validate the information. Each institution that has to validate information according to the agreed task sharing must examine the reported probable improprieties, correct them when necessary, and communicate the

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