

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Report to the Federal Parliament: Pensions with a foreign component



The Court of Audit sent a report to the House of Representatives in which it analyses how the National Pensions Office (ONP/RVP) and the National Institute for the Social Security of the Self-employed (Inasti/RSVZ) process pensions applications involving beneficiaries entitled to a Belgian pension, no matter whether they are living abroad or are entitled to a pension abroad. The Court of Audit examined if the Office and the Institute's procedures ensure an efficient and accurate processing of these pension applications and provide a transparent and quality service. It came to the conclusion that the procedures do not entirely cover all the risks of late or undue pension granting or payment. The tools used by both institutions in order to meet the deadlines do not ensure the timely processing of these applications. Moreover, the various granting procedures used by the Office and the Institute for applications with a mixed career hamper these deadlines. Furthermore, the IT procedures and monitoring are being hindered by the absence of electronic data exchange between countries or links with foreign databanks. Finally, the Court of Audit identified several areas that need to be improved in terms of communication and handling of complaints.

The ONP and the RSVZ are processing all pension applications of employed or self-employed persons, thus including applications with a foreign component. More and more people are entitled to a pension abroad or live abroad after they retire. These applications with a foreign component are more complex than ordinary national files.

The Court's audit reveals that the ONP/RVP and Inasti/RSVZ procedures – while being sufficiently developed – cannot cover all the risks. First of all, the computerisation of the granting and payment processes cannot be done optimised because data exchange with abroad is sometimes lacking. Requesting information from abroad is not always easy. In some cases, the ONP/RVP has to work with a sworn statement by the beneficiary, of which information is not confirmed by a foreign institution.

The Court of Audit noticed that the length and the delay for processing pension applications with a foreign component were not followed up in 2013. It is only since 2014 that the ONP/RVP is measuring this delay and included it into its reporting regarding the

management agreement 2013-2015. The method of measuring did not entirely comply with the existing legislation and was applied only once the procedure was completed; therefore, it was useless in terms of steering and following up of the pension procedure. The Inasti/RSVZ did not even include these pensions into its management agreement, so that measuring was impossible.

The different granting procedures of the ONP/RVP and Inasti/RSVZ cause another problem when it comes to calculating deadlines for mixed pension applications in these two institutions. The Court of Audit recommends that all pension institutions adopt a common approach when calculating the length and deadline for processing pension applications.

Finally, when it comes to customer service, the ONP and Inasti/RSVZ made efforts to be more customer friendly, particularly by proposing common application forms, by developing their handling of complaints and by encouraging pensioners to communicate with them by e-mail. However, they should take more initiatives regarding electronic communication with beneficiaries living abroad and develop the monitoring of complaints related to pensions or to mixed pensions applications.

The Minister for Pensions and the Minister for Self-Employed promised to address several recommendations made by the Court of Audit. The ONP/RVP and Inasti/RSVZ already initiated discussions in order to adopt a common approach of the process and the calculation method for deadlines. The ONP will adapt its management agreement 2016-2018 in order calculate deadlines according to law. Regarding mixed pensions, the ONP and RSVZ will work more closely together to ensure a better service when it comes to complaints as well as to develop more common applications forms, among which a common notification by 2019.

The report is available in French and Dutch on the Court's website: ([www.courtofaudit.be](http://www.courtofaudit.be)).