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## 10,000 new jobs created in non-profit care sector

Following widespread industrial action in late 1997 and early 1998, the non-profit care sector in Belgium has witnessed an increase of about 10,000 jobs. These have been created by a variety of means, including an improvement in staffing ratios, the introduction of mobile teams and reductions in employers' social security contributions. The number could have been even higher, but the employers have not yet used up their full budget for new recruitment.

At the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998 Belgium was hit by a wave of so-called "white anger (BE9712225N)". Employees in the not-for-profit health and care sectors began a series of protest actions for more employment and shorter working time. The trade unions' demands amounted to an increase of 70,000 new jobs over the following three to five years.

The first to answer the unions' list of demands was the federal government ([BE9804233F](#)). It promised an extra 23,000 jobs in the sector by the year 2003. The introduction of mobile teams in hospitals and care institutions would, it was claimed, provide a few thousand new jobs. The largest part of the employment drive, however, would be financed through a programme called the "social Maribel". This programme reduces employers' social security contributions in exchange for new employment in certain sectors. The government has promised to increase the monthly reduction in contributions for each new worker recruit in two stages from BEF 39,000 (EUR 322) to about BEF 117,000 (EUR 967).

The regional governments reacted as well and stated their willingness to contribute to creating an extra 4,500 jobs in those segments of the care sector which fall under their responsibility: reformatories, care for people with disabilities, daycare centres and socio-cultural work.

The federal minister of employment, Miet Smet, has recently reported that the federal government has already carried out most of its commitments. In 1998, the sector added 10,000 extra jobs (mostly part time). This is largely a result of the measures taken by the various government institutions:

- the improvement in staffing ratios resulted in 1,800 new jobs;
- the Maribel operation created 7,000 new positions;
- the conversion of hospital beds into elderly care beds provided 620 new jobs; and
- mobile teams are responsible for a few hundred more new positions.

In principle, even more employment could have been created. The sector, however, has not yet fully used the total amount of funding made available by the government over the period April 1997 to July 1998. About BEF 500 million in the private sector and BEF 1.7 billion in the public sector have not yet been used to create more jobs.

Minister Smet has mandated the National Office of Social Security (Rijksdienst voor Sociale Zekerheid/Office National de Sécurité Sociale) to transfer the available Maribel funds, about BEF 12 billion every year, directly to the responsible funds in the various sectors. The implication is that those willing to create more employment under the Maribel rules may be compensated more directly and can spend the funds not used by those segments of the sector which are unwilling to make use of the opportunities or are stalling in doing so.

The social partners will be monitoring the appropriate and effective use of the funds for job creation purposes. If misuse is observed, employers will have to refund the Maribel funds that they have used.

Page last updated: 28 January, 1999

### About this document

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- **Author:** Hans Bruyninckx
- **Country:** Belgium
- **Language:** EN
- **Publication date:** 28-01-1999
- **Sector:** Health and Social Work

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