



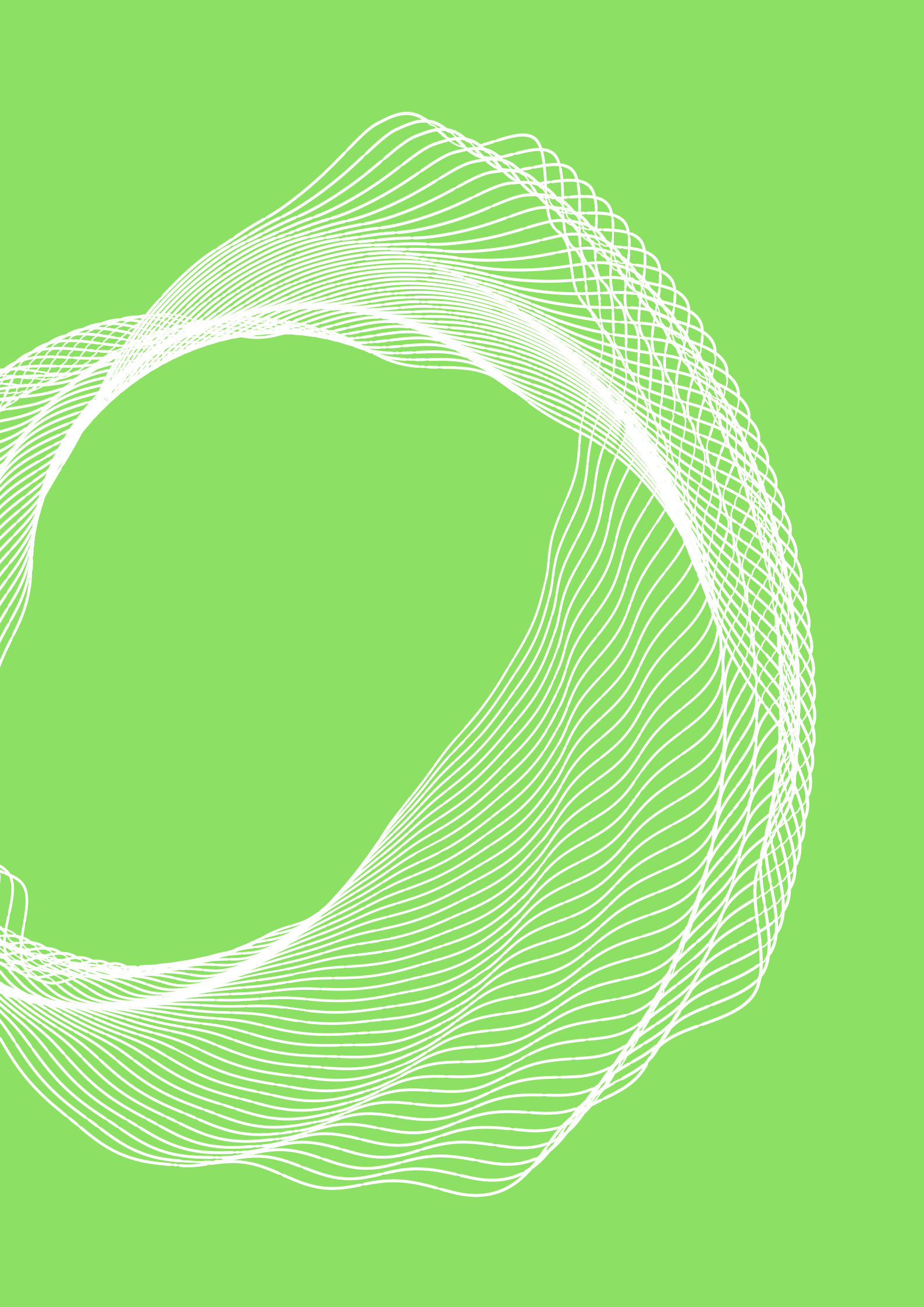
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Strategic Implementation Plan for Social Security Inspections

Strengthening compliance with Social Security
in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

August, 2024



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Summary

The report outlines a six-month implementation plan for social security inspectors in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, with key recommendations and steps for building inspection capacity and ensuring effective enforcement of social security laws.

Since 2021, the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) and the ILO have collaborated to build the social security inspection function, aiming for better compliance with legal provisions and the protection of workers' rights. Training sessions began in July 2024, focusing on various modules such as legal frameworks, inspection procedures and ethical standards for inspectors.

The purpose of this report is to suggest next steps to guide the implementation of social security inspections, and covers the following topics:

Review and adaptation of training curriculum:

- ▶ Training sessions should be reduced from five days to four days to focus more on practical issues without compromising technical content.
- ▶ A revised curriculum containing technical content, case studies and tests should be used for subsequent training activities.

Schedule for future training

- ▶ Further training sessions for new inspectors will occur in October 2024, with newly appointed inspectors undergoing four-day training sessions.
- ▶ Trainers who attended the July session will be the ones delivering the training, and they will be required to hold preparation workshops to refresh their knowledge.

Implementation plan for newly trained inspectors:

- ▶ New inspectors should start with a pilot phase, conducting 30 inspections over a two-month period in October–November 2024.
- ▶ Following the pilot, inspectors should undergo an adaptation phase at the central and provincial levels, focusing on familiarization with legal resources, administrative steps and inspection procedures.
- ▶ A mentoring system should be established where experienced inspectors accompany new inspectors on their first inspections.

Beyond the six-month plan

- ▶ After the initial implementation phase, inspectors should begin performing independent inspections.
- ▶ In the first four months, inspectors should prioritize indirect inspections focusing on labour units participating in the social security scheme.
- ▶ By the second four-month period, inspectors should conduct a mix of direct and indirect inspections, focusing on units not complying with social security regulations.

Inspection priorities and goals

- ▶ Inspections should be guided by national and sectoral goals, focusing on promoting compliance through information and advisory measures before resorting to enforcement.
- ▶ Data collection from internal (LSSO) and external sources will be critical in setting inspection priorities based on risks and non-compliance trends.

Monitoring and evaluation

- ▶ A Working Group should monitor how new inspectors implement their training and provide support through regular feedback.
- ▶ Management should track the efficiency and effectiveness of inspections to ensure quality, consistency and accountability.

Support and awareness activities

- ▶ A help desk should be set up to provide technical advice and address inspectors' questions during their early stages.
- ▶ A national awareness-raising campaign will promote compliance and inform businesses and citizens about the importance of social security laws and inspections.

This comprehensive plan aims to build a sustainable inspection workforce, ensure ongoing compliance with social security laws and enhance the capacity of inspectors through structured training, mentoring and monitoring.

1. Introduction

Since 2021, the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) and the ILO have been working together to build the social security inspection function of the LSSO. The objective of this collaboration is to contribute to better compliance with legal provisions on social security and to protect workers' rights with respect to their social security entitlements. As a result of this collaboration, Social Security Inspection Guidelines as well as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) have been produced. In July 2024, on the basis of these two landmark tools, the ILO and the LSSO organized the first training of social security inspections. A total of 15 inspectors took part in the training, which represented an important step towards building efficient and operational social security inspection practices within the LSSO. One of the objectives of this training session was to kick-off the transfer of knowledge and skills to all of the LSSO's inspectors. To this end, the July training session took a training of trainers approach, which involved the trainee inspectors being prepared to serve as trainers for future social security inspectors appointed by the LSSO.

Over the five-day July session, the training covered the seven modules listed below:

1. Background of social security inspection, foundational concepts and legal and administrative framework;
2. Compliance strategy and powers of a social security inspection;
3. Planning for and preparation of inspections;
4. Conducting an inspection visit;
5. Reporting, closing meeting and follow-up;
6. Ethical code for social security inspectors;
7. Soft skills.

This initial training experience paved the way for building the capacities of the LSSO in conducting social security inspections. It is equally important to implement a subsequent training programme for all the remaining inspection staff members and to plan the implementation of actual social security inspection work.

The purpose of this report is to suggest next steps to guide the implementation of social security inspections.

2. Review of the training curriculum for training of trainers activities

From the beginning, the idea of making adaptations to the length and scope of the training sessions has been embraced. After the first training experience held in July and taking into account its development and results, the next training sessions to be delivered by the newly trained trainers should have a maximum duration of five days. It may be advisable to reduce the duration to four days, based on the experience from the initial training. Likewise, the training should focus as much as possible on practical issues, although without forgetting to address the technical contents.

The training curriculum already elaborated within the ILO project is expected to serve as the training manual and should be used by the trainers in subsequent training activities. It contains lists of technical contents and annexes with case studies, exercises, question and answer (Q&A) tests, and checklists. The Social Security Inspection Guidelines and the SOP with its flowcharts, forms and checklists are meant to be used as supporting materials for the training.

As mentioned above, the training curriculum has been revised in the light of the experience gained during the July 2024 training session. Nevertheless, the duration, the distribution of training modules and the time frame devoted to practical and theoretical sessions remain flexible and adaptable to the new training sessions and the new trainers. New trainers should prepare their own Q&A tests with a view to personalizing the monitoring of the learning achieved, although they could use the same tests used during the initial ILO training in July.

3. Schedule for the next training sessions

Further training sessions should be delivered at LSSO headquarters or another convenient location. The training sessions should be tentatively organized in accordance with the table below. As noted above, the trainers for these sessions are to be selected from among the 15 social security inspectors who received the ILO training in July (hereafter referred to as the “July 2024 inspectors”). Before the next training sessions, the July 2024 inspectors who are selected to be trainers in the new training sessions should participate in a preparation workshop in order to refresh their knowledge of the subjects and to assign modules to each trainer.

► **Table 1. Schedule for the training of all social security inspectors**

Type of session	Number of training groups	Tentative dates
Preparation and update workshop for trainers	1	Second fortnight of September 2024
Training for inspectors at the central and provincial levels (around 50 inspectors)	4 (12–13 trainees per groups)	October 2024

Note: “Provincial” in this context also includes inspectors for Vientiane Capital.

The upcoming training sessions for new inspectors should have a duration of four days (maximum 5 days). The sessions should be organized in a full-time format (no less than 6 hours per day). It is recommended that the training be delivered by more than one of the July 2024 inspectors. Ideally, the LSSO could organize one trainer per day or per module.

4. Implementation plan for newly trained inspectors

The consultant has worked jointly with the LSSO and supported it in producing a six-month implementation plan for LSSO inspectors to put in practice the knowledge, findings and recommendations acquired in the initial July 2024 training. This implementation plan aims at helping inspectors in their first steps of inspection practice and encouraging them to enforce the law and strengthen the social security system by making use of an adequate balance between technical assistance and sanctioning powers.

This implementation plan envisages the most appropriate way of starting the inspection practice of trainees. The central level of the social security inspectorate should play a key role in supporting inspectors in their first steps conducting inspections. This implementation plan will require steady technical advice as well as support on demand. The plan also foresees the development of a pilot inspection experience and the appointment of a team for monitoring the inspection practices of newly trained inspectors, with monthly follow-up meetings. A support mailbox should also be set up in order to provide technical advice solutions to questions and concerns that come up in relation to these initial inspection actions by newly trained inspectors.

4.1. New inspectors: Initial steps on the job

In the immediate future, the following steps should be taken to prepare new social security inspectors for their work:

First step: Pilot experience for July 2024 inspectors

As noted above, trainers selected from among the July 2024 inspectors will be the ones to train the next cohorts of new social security inspectors. In order to prepare the July 2024 inspectors for both their work as inspectors and for their role as trainers, they should all undergo a pilot experience involving a total of 30 inspections of actual labour units. Twenty of these inspections should be indirect inspections, and ten should be direct inspections. The inspections should be carried out by five teams of three inspectors – which translates to **two direct inspections for each team and four indirect inspections for each team**. The labour units will be previously selected by the LSSO, taking into account the data and information that lie in the files. The pilot experience will take place during August and September 2024.

Second step: Appointment of and orientation process for new inspectors at the central and provincial levels

Once all of the new inspectors have been appointed and assigned to their corresponding unit – either central or provincial – they should undergo an initial process of orientation to become acquainted with the relevant issues, such as:

- ▶ staff matters;
- ▶ structure and organization of the inspectorate and the LSSO;
- ▶ the organization's mission, values and goals;
- ▶ management of legal resources;
- ▶ management of the information system and access to resources and databases;

- ▶ administrative steps and inspection procedures;
- ▶ equipment;
- ▶ basic behaviours and professional contacts;
- ▶ high-risk sectors and industries;
- ▶ practices for dealing with complaints;
- ▶ collaboration with other agencies; and
- ▶ coordination and joint inspections.

After this initial orientation period (five working days' duration), the new inspectors will receive the training on inspection (four or five days).

Third step: Mentoring system

At this stage, new social security inspectors will hold their first contacts with labour units, employers and workers. The LSSO will determine the inspection workforce – that is, the number of full-time equivalent inspectors – given the fact that LSSO inspection staff will be required to combine inspection work with other tasks (according to LSSO sources). This situation should be provisional only, and inspectors should ultimately only work on inspection activity.

Once the full-time equivalent inspection workforce has been determined at the central level and (if possible) at the provincial level, a mentoring system should be established so that already trained inspectors should systematically accompany inspectors who have recently received training. Mentors should be selected from among the July 2024 inspectors who have already carried out inspections during the pilot experience (which is expected to occur from 1 August to 30 September).

For their **first two months of engaging with labour units**, new inspectors should take part in indirect inspections of labour units currently participating in the social security scheme, with the aim being for these to be thematic inspections addressing specific topics. Each of these inspections should be carried out by an experienced inspector (mentor). The mentor, who will serve as the head of the team, should be joined by three new inspectors for these indirect inspections.

Following this two-month period, the new inspectors should accompany mentors in direct inspections to all types of labour units (that is, not just those that are currently social security participants) and for all types of inspection objectives for another **period of four weeks**. Here too, the inspection team should consist of one mentor, as head of the team, and three new inspectors.

The number of inspections undertaken during these two mentoring periods will depend on the available inspection workforce. It is also advisable to create an arrangement with the labour inspectorate to allow for collaboration during the mentoring period. Although the matters subject to inspection are different for the labour inspectorate, new social security inspectors will be able to observe the practices involved in labour inspections and develop an improved understanding of how labour issues might have a relation to social security.

During both the indirect and direct inspections, mentors should provide supervision to ensure that new inspectors: make use of the proper documentation (forms and checklists); use the necessary inspection tools and collect adequate data; and present accurate and detailed reports. Mentors should provide weekly feedback to the new inspectors and to managers, identifying examples of proper performance as well as areas that need improvement. Mentors should also provide feedback to an ad hoc Working Group that will be set up to monitor the implementation plan.

► Table 2. An overview of initial steps related to onboarding new inspectors

Action	Method	Target	Time frame
ILO initial training	5 full-time days of theoretical and practical training	Receive full-fledged training: 7 training modules	1–5 July 2024
Pilot inspection experience	Trained inspectors paving the way	30 total inspections carried out with selected labour units (10 direct/20 indirect), using 3-person teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► 5 teams x 2 direct inspections each ► 5 teams x 4 indirect inspections each 	1 August – 30 September 2024
Appointment of new inspectors at the central and provincial levels	Selection process as per LSSO rules	Approximately 50 new inspectors appointed	1 August – 30 September 2024
Orientation of new inspectors	5-day orientation	Knowledge of inspection issues (no actual inspections performed)	October 2024
Preparation and update workshop for trainers	3 days	Refresher and update on subjects and training modules	Before training sessions for new inspectors
Training of new inspectors	4 or 5 full-time days of theoretical and practical training	Receive full-fledged training: 7 training modules	October
Mentored indirect inspections	3 new inspectors will be placed in a team together with a mentor serving as the head of team	Labour units participating in social security scheme; all subjects	2 months
Mentored direct inspections	3 new inspectors will be placed in a team together with a mentor serving as the head of team	All types of labour units; all subjects	4 weeks
Total time frame	Six months		

5. Beyond the six-month implementation plan: Inspectors taking on duties

After the implementation plan phase, new inspectors will take up their duties and begin to inspect labour units by themselves, either through indirect or direct inspections. Where the inspection is to be carried out by a team, the team leader should preferably be an already experienced inspector from among the July 2024 inspectors. The LSSO should plan inspections according to the following criteria:

- ▶ First period (four months) – Indirect inspections targeting:
 - Labour units that are already registered in the social security scheme but have never paid any contributions or have given up paying contributions;
 - Small labour units selected in specific sectors, any matter;
 - Follow-up inspections, if any.
- ▶ Second period (four months) – Indirect and direct inspections.
 - Labour units that are already registered in the social security scheme but have never paid any contributions or have given up paying contributions;
 - Small and medium labour units that are not participating in the social security scheme (undeclared work);
 - Small and medium labour units in specific sectors, any matter;
 - Follow-up inspections, if any;
 - Ad hoc inspections (orders from authorities, complaints and so on), if any.
- ▶ Third period (everything after the first eight months) – Indirect and direct inspections targeting:
 - All types of inspections and labour units, all types of matters.

Emergency inspections will be carried out by decision of the Director. An outline of the recommended entry into service of new inspectors is put forward in table 3.

► **Table 3. Overview of the inspection actions to be taken by new inspectors in the periods following the completion of training**

FIRST PERIOD			
Type of inspection	Method	Targets	Time frame
Indirect regular inspections	Done using inspection teams; awareness-raising visits (where appropriate)	Labour units registered with the social security scheme that have never paid or have given up paying contributions Small labour units selected in specific sectors	4 months
Follow up inspections, if any	Inspection team	All targets	
Emergency inspections	Inspection team	Decision by Director	
SECOND PERIOD			
Type of inspection	Method	Targets	Time frame
Indirect and direct regular inspections	Done using inspection teams; awareness-raising visits (where appropriate)	Labour units registered with the social security scheme that have never paid or have given up paying contributions Small and medium labour units in specific sectors, any matter. Undeclared work (small and medium companies that do not participate the social security scheme).	4 months
Follow-up inspections, if any		All targets	
Ad hoc inspections, if any		All targets	
Emergency inspection		Decision by Director	
THIRD PERIOD			
Type of inspection	Method	Targets	Time frame
Direct and indirect regular inspections	Alone, in pairs or as a team	All targets	After the 6-month implementation plan and the combined 8 months of the First and Second Periods above
Follow-up inspections		All targets	
Ad hoc inspections		All targets	
Emergency inspections		All targets	

6. Setting up national and sectoral inspection plans and goals for newly trained inspectors

During the six-month implementation/transitional period, the inspection objectives should take into account the Ministry's policies on social security. All new inspectors should therefore be briefed on the Ministry's policy priorities and current national inspection priorities and targets as part of a five-day orientation (as noted in section 4.1 above). Consultations with workers' and employers' organizations could as well be held.

The overall goal should be to achieve a significant impact on labour units and to use the implementation plan for new inspectors as an opportunity to efficiently promote compliance and raise awareness in the business community. The setting of specific inspection objectives should follow a strategy that ensures an inspection approach inspired by an adequate balance between technical assistance and enforcement powers. The strategy should also take due account of the resources available, and should follow certain parameters, as follows:

A. Primary inspection action

During the implementation period, the provision of information and advice should be the general rule during regular inspections, instead of taking deterrent and enforcement actions. Inspection visits could be focused on raising awareness and addressing any questions or doubts that employers have in relation to social security matters. Only in cases of follow-up or ad hoc inspections (if any even take place) should the teams of new inspectors be entitled to take enforcement measures such as proposing fines, provided that the legislation and the SOP allow for such deterrent actions.

B. Collection of data and information

During the implementation period, the social security inspectorate should work to collect all of the relevant data already recorded within the LSSO or received by LSSO, particularly:

- ▶ complaints from workers regarding their social security status, if any;
- ▶ claims from workers regarding a specific social security benefit, if any;
- ▶ complaints from trade unions, if any;
- ▶ reports/data from labour inspections related to social security;
- ▶ reports/data from the Tax Authority;
- ▶ reports/data from the Commercial Register;
- ▶ complains from employers or their organizations, if any;
- ▶ orders or enquiries to investigate issued by other competent authorities; and
- ▶ enquiries issued by other public institutions.

Collaboration with the labour inspectorate will be useful in order to obtain information from their database (for example, claims for social security benefits after an accident at work; no registration with social security; complaints that refer to labour issues – overtime, night work, and so on – that may have influence on social security contributions), as well as from their daily work, in order to estimate the workload for reactive social security inspection activity.

The social security inspectorate should manage all these data in order to make a first estimation of required investigatory actions, taking into account that the number of cases requiring reactive action might increase once the new inspectors start covering inspection subjects. On the basis of the data above-mentioned, the social security inspectorate should elaborate an annual plan of inspections and assess the staff needed to accomplish this plan.

Likewise, the joint management of the above-mentioned data and any data provided or imported from other sources should allow the inspectorate to draw up a risk map and to devise a plan of priorities.

C. Criteria for deciding the types of inspections

New inspectors should carry out indirect and direct inspections in accordance to the time frames laid out in table 3 above. After the six-month implementation period and initial periods of taking up their roles (Periods 1 and 2 in table 3), new inspectors should undertake a combination of direct and indirect inspections, with the mix determined in part on transport/vehicle resource availability and budgetary constraints. An optimal approach should be around 70 per cent indirect inspections and 30 per cent direct inspections, subject to the Ministry's social security policies. Ultimately, however, the higher the number of direct inspections carried out, the greater the impact on labour units and consequently the greater the promotion of social security compliance. This is because direct visits tend to have a multiplier effect on labour units within the same industrial or economic sector and/or within the geographic vicinity of other inspected labour units.

D. Pilot experience

The six-month implementation period and initial periods of taking up their roles (Periods 1 and 2 in table 3) should serve as a pilot experience for determining inspection priorities and objectives, which can be shaped in two directions simultaneously: (1) upstream, as field labour inspectors and local office managers provide information to the central level on the prevalent problems and priorities at the regional level; and (2) downstream, as the central level informs to regional managers and field inspectors of national priorities and the expected results. The determined objectives and inspection targets should be:

- ▶ clearly defined;
- ▶ specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound (SMART);
- ▶ evidence-based;
- ▶ consistent with resources available for front-line inspection; and
- ▶ consistent with available administrative and management support.

The criteria for selecting the labour units that will be subject to inspection should take into account, among others, the following criteria:

- ▶ Selection of labour units in accordance to their size.
- ▶ Selection of labour units based on a risk assessment approach. The greater the risk of non-compliance and law violation according to pre-established criteria, the more frequent the inspections should be.
- ▶ Risk of non-compliance among sectors/labour units based on compliance records.
- ▶ Specific risks.
- ▶ New enterprises.

The social security inspectorate may make use of rating systems taking account of the above-mentioned criteria.

After the implementation period and the initial periods of taking up their roles (Periods 1 and 2 in table 3), inspections could be carried out on all types of labour units, including larger enterprises, which potentially affect more working lives and therefore should be given greater priority over smaller enterprises. Larger companies can also spark a culture of compliance among smaller companies working as subcontractors in their supply chains. Consequently, the degree to which these large companies are prompted to comply with the social security scheme will determine to some extent the degree to which compliance culture filters down to small- and medium-sized enterprises. After the implementation period and the initial periods of taking up their roles, other criteria could also be used to determine which labour units are going to be inspected, such as labour units' annual revenues, their amount of social security debt, labour units working with shifts or on holidays, sectors where employers tend to be more uncooperative, time elapsed since the last routine inspection and so on.

7. Monitoring how inspectors put into practice their newly acquired knowledge

An ad hoc Working Group should be set up with a view to monitoring the whole inspection process. The Working Group should be composed of LSSO managers at the central level, provincial directors/chief inspectors and a group of mentors. Mentors should provide feedback to the Working Group on the course of the inspection practice during the first two months, and the Group should assess shortcomings and strengths in weekly meetings.

The Working Group should monitor the work of inspectors and make sure that plans are properly implemented and provide feedback on addressing any unresolved difficulties in meeting the inspection plan. The Working Group should also assist the help desk (see below) in solving difficulties that arise at each stage of the process.

8. Supporting inspectors during their first inspections

The LSSO shall encourage inspectors during their first months of work to employ advisory/warning/education measures instead of more executive measures, according to the policies of the Ministry and the LSSO. The implementation activities should be geared towards policy guidelines for social security inspection action.

A help desk (mailbox and telephone) for new inspectors to receive technical advice solutions to concerns and enquiries could be set up. This help desk should address questions and concerns around legal powers/warning, clarity of legal provisions, issues related to collaboration with other stakeholders, setbacks such as obstruction, lack of material resources, cars, equipment, and so on.

9. Evaluating effectiveness

The social security inspectorate's management shall examine the time spent on each inspection (direct and indirect) and the number of inspections carried out per inspector per month. This

Based on the monitoring and evaluation of the initial six month implementation plan period and the following eight months of initial inspections (Periods 1 and 2), management should decide whether or not to review the SOP and/or inspection forms to potentially simplify procedural steps or suggest changes in legal provisions, where appropriate.

The management should monitor how the inspection process and related interventions are carried out and the degree to which effectiveness and efficiency are being achieved. Likewise, the management should ensure that inspections are performed with quality, consistency, fairness, transparency and accountability. Based on the findings and conclusions of this monitoring and evaluation, the LSSO management should decide to take improvement measures, if needed.

10. Awareness-raising activities

In parallel with the first inspection activity stage, a campaign could be launched in order to raise awareness about the benefits and advantages of complying with social security law and the work of the social security inspectorate.

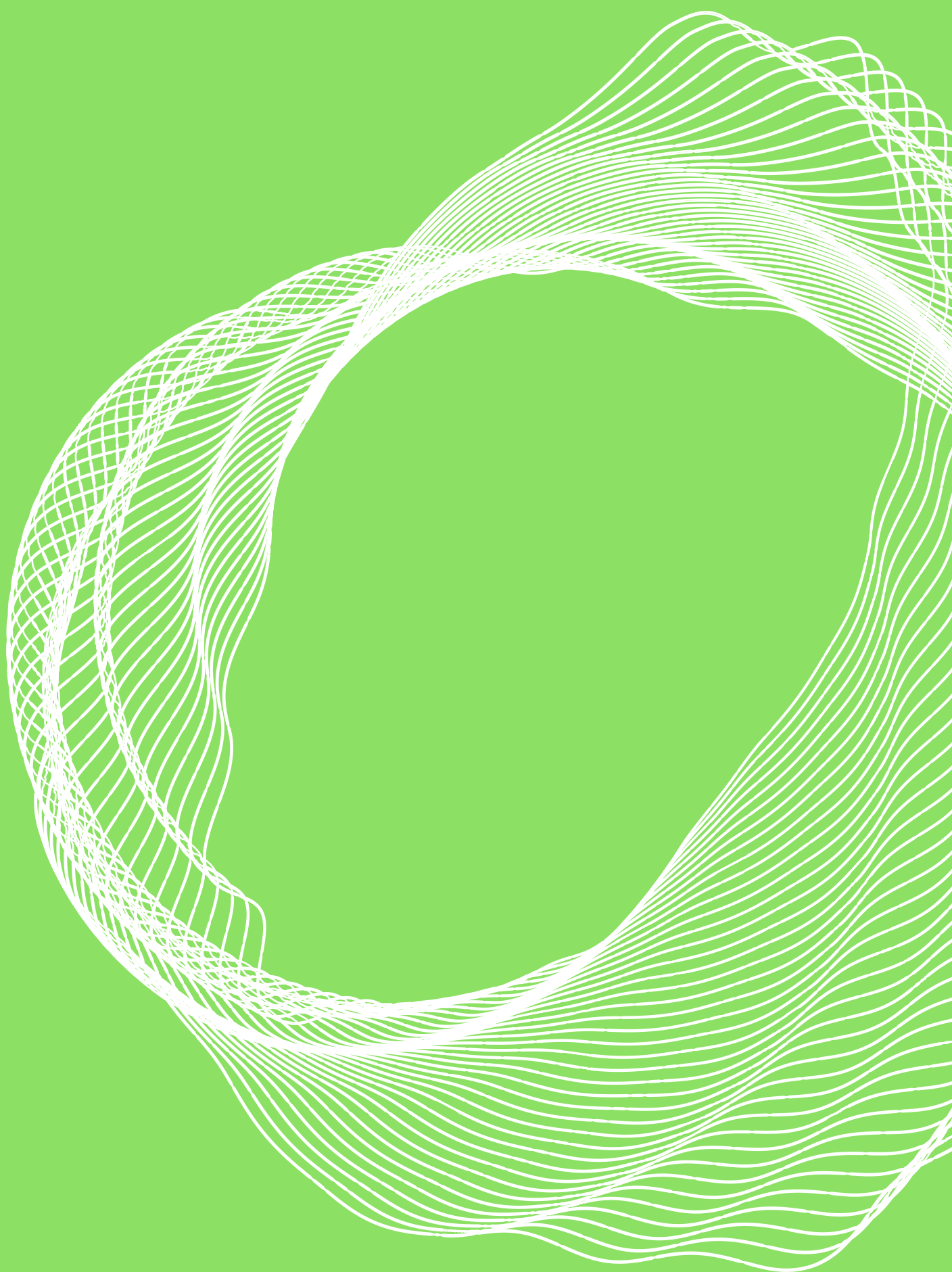
This awareness-raising campaign should be widely disseminated among all duty-holders and involved national parties, including foreign investors. The campaign should use, as far as possible, all the available information resources and media, and clearly inform the citizenry about the functions and objectives of the social security inspectorate and about what can be expected from inspection services.

11. Data and cooperation resources

The selection of labour units that will be subject to inspection by new inspectors should take into account data drawn from internal sources (LSSO) and external sources (Commercial Register, and, if feasible, from other sources such as the Tax Authority or insurance institutions). The more elements and data that can be obtained to inform the selection process, the better the risk assessment and the more effective the inspection action.

Annex 1. Implementation plan time frame

Activity	Time frame							
	One week	Month I	Month II	Month III	Month IV	Month V	Month VI	Next stage Months VII-XIV
Initial training								
Pilot inspection experience								
Appointment of new inspectors/adaptation stage								
Catch up and update meeting (future trainers)								
Subsequent training sessions								
Mentored indirect inspections								
Mentored direct inspections								
Inspectors on service								





Strategic Implementation Plan for Social Security Inspections

Strengthening compliance with social Security
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