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Andreetta, S. Digital practices of negotiation. Social workers at the intersection of migration and social policies in Switzerland and Belgium

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Paperwork has always been a central part of bureaucratic work. Over the last few years, bureaucratic procedures have become increasingly standardised and digitalised. Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork within welfare offices in Switzerland and Belgium, we reflect on the way evidence is constructed within social policy and cases built for or against noncitizen welfare recipients in order to show how paper truths are established and challenged. The focus on digital practices within public policy implementation highlights how it contributes to enhanced control mechanisms on the implementation level and how migration law continues to guide welfare governance for noncitizens. This allows targeting of the most marginalised groups, whose rights to access state support are institutionally impeded. Through database information flows, official forms, paper reports and face-to-face meetings, we further show how a hybrid form of bureaucratic work emerges, where direct contact with the client is still key, yet highly influenced by standardisation processes.

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