

BELGIUM: INTEGRATING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY INTO PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This case study details how the Belgian Federal Public Service for Employment, Labour, and Social Dialogue (FPS Employment) integrates diversity into psychosocial risk (PSRs) assessments through targeted initiatives and tools. It explores the various methods used to raise awareness and implement provisions related to PSRs and workforce diversity. The first example is the inclusion of diversity in the evidence-based, open-source PSRs questionnaire developed by FPS Employment. The second example is the recent creation of an OiRA¹ tool for PSR. These are among the many tools, guidance materials, and training resources offered to employers, prevention advisors, and other stakeholders. These resources aim to assist employers in fulfilling their legal obligations when conducting PSR assessments, including those related to diversity, such as discrimination in the workplace, abusive behaviour, harassment, and sexual harassment.

According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) report on PSRs in Belgium (EU-OSHA, 2025a), in 2020, approximately 7.9 % of all Belgian employees reported being exposed to PSRs. In 2021, this proportion increased to 8.12 %, and then to 8.39 % in 2022. Across all age groups, women have higher exposure to PSRs than men, and workers in the youngest and oldest age groups face the highest exposure. In 2022, 0.83 % of all workers reported being victims of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment. In addition, data from the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (RIZIV/INAMI), cited in EU-OSHA (2025a), shows that disability due to burnout and depression lasting longer than one year increased by 46 % between 2016 and 2021. Women made up more than two-thirds of individuals unable to work due to burnout or depression. Although the largest group affected was aged 50-64, the most significant increase was observed among self-employed workers aged 25-39.

Key takeaways

- According to FPS Employment, raising awareness, providing research, and developing tools to assess risks, as well as implementing good regulation, including a global vision and shared standards across Europe, can all help address these issues. There is also support for including diversity-related PSR standards in an EU Directive on PSRs.
- Traditionally, OSH policies and practices have been based on a 'standard' worker model that is male, middle-aged, white and able-bodied. The tools developed challenge this model by supporting improvements in psychosocial well-being for the whole working population, taking into account diversity and gender-sensitive approaches.
- The initiatives described in this case study are transferable to other Member States. The case study provides valuable learning on the benefits of integrating diversity into PSR assessments, which can play a significant role in promoting inclusive OSH policies and practices that take into account and address the needs, experiences of, and exposure to PSRs by different groups of workers. This approach also shows that integrating these issues into PSR assessments ultimately benefits all workers.

Legislative and policy framework

Employers have a legal duty to assess work-related PSRs (Article 32/2(1) of the Act of 4 August 1996 on well-being of workers in the performance of their work, amended in 2014 with new regulations on PSRs, and under Article I.3-1 of the Code on Well-being at Work). Employers must assess PSRs and

¹ OiRA – Online interactive Risk Assessment – is a web platform that enables the creation of sectoral risk assessment tools in a number of languages in an easy and standardised way, developed and maintained by EU-OSHA
<https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en>.

address issues such as stress, burnout, violence, work-related conflicts, and moral or sexual harassment, with the participation of workers. Article 32 clarifies that violence and harassment may be related to discrimination on multiple grounds. Employers have to establish action plans for managing PSRs (included in the global prevention plan and the annual action plan). These workplace policies have to be negotiated with workers' representatives in workplace committees on safety and health at work ('prevention committees').

The law highlights specific roles for employers, line managers, the workplace prevention and protection committee, prevention advisors, and confidential counsellors in implementing prevention programmes. PSR prevention advisors are mandatory in all workplaces to monitor PSR factors, assist with risk assessments, advise on preventive measures, handle employee requests for psychosocial interventions (including informal and formal resolution processes), and maintain a register of incidents caused by third parties. The law also mandates the appointment of confidential counsellors within workplaces, who serve as primary contact points for confidential advice and support, as well as informal internal procedures to help workers suffering from PSRs. The appointment of an internal confidential counsellor in companies with 50 or more employees became compulsory from 1 December 2023.

On 1 June 2023, provisions were introduced to enhance protection against retaliation for all victims of discrimination, including those affected by discriminatory violence or harassment, covering amendments to both the well-being legislation and the federal anti-discrimination laws. With regards to violence and harassment at work, Belgium's ratification of International Labour Organisation Convention No 190 (ILO C190) has helped to focus attention on the prevention of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) and the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing and preventing violence and harassment in risk assessment.

The National Action Plan to Improve the Well-being of Workers in the Performance of Their Work (2022-2027) (FPS Employment, 2022) specifically addresses the prevention of PSRs, musculoskeletal disorders, and the well-being of vulnerable groups of workers. It includes the reintegration of disabled workers, e.g. through a collective reintegration policy in companies and by investing in communication and awareness campaigns. The plan also aims to monitor Belgian legislation on PSRs and its alignment with anti-discrimination laws. It includes measures to support the elimination of violence and harassment at work, in accordance with the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190. Additionally, it seeks to establish a regulatory framework with practical solutions to protect the well-being of domestic workers and ensure the full implementation of ILO Convention No. 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (2011). Further measures are planned to prevent risks for workers affected by chronic ill health, disability, or ageing, such as high workloads or workplace conflicts, along with collective reintegration policies within companies. Under the framework of the action plan, actions related to diversity are also incorporated within the Mental Well-being at Work Plan (BEMAT) 2022-2027.

The national collective labour agreement (CLA) on the prevention of stress at work, concluded in 1999 between social partners and the National Labour Council (CCT No 72 of 30 March 1999), addresses the issue of stress at work from the perspective of working conditions, with a role assigned to the works council. The purpose of the CCT is to identify and tackle problems at the collective level, within the entire company, and at the group level.

Regarding anti-discrimination, different frameworks coexist, each with distinct objectives and scope. The well-being at work law emphasises the prevention of PSRs (which may include discrimination). In contrast, anti-discrimination laws focus on prosecution and do not contain provisions for preventing discrimination at work, nor do they include internal work procedures to address these issues. Moreover, the well-being at work law only applies during the employment relationship between the employer and the workers, while the anti-discrimination laws also apply during recruitment and dismissal. In using the well-being at work law, employers should therefore consider situations that may be a source of discrimination at work in their risk analysis. This also means that workers can utilise the internal procedures outlined in the Well-being at Work Law to improve the work situation and restore workers' well-being. The role of the prevention advisor conducting the internal procedure is not to determine whether discrimination occurred, but rather to assess the facts. If a worker wishes to be recognised as a victim of discrimination, they must make an application to the courts or other competent institutions to address the matter (such as Unia or the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men).

Collaboration occurs on shared issues (see below, for example, the joint workshops on digital sexual violence conducted by FPS Employment and the Institute for Equality between Women and Men under the National Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence 2021-2025).

Description of the interventions

Example 1: Integration of diversity in the PSR questionnaire

To support companies in fulfilling their legal obligations to prevent PSRs, including measures to prevent discrimination, violence, and harassment, FPS Employment has developed various risk-analysis tools, awareness-raising resources, checklists, and alert indicators. The PSR questionnaire itself contains multiple-choice questions and is an open-source online tool to assist employers in assessing PSRs and complying with legal requirements (FPS Employment, 2023a). This questionnaire accompanies the first two steps of the risk analysis (inventory and analysis of existing risks) and provides the starting point for the third step (taking action). In addition to the questionnaire, a user's guide describes the different stages of the survey and data processing, an Excel template for data processing, and a template showing what an analysis looks like once the data has been entered. Using these documents, employers can conduct a psychosocial risk assessment on their own or in collaboration with a psychosocial prevention consultant.

The PSR questionnaire has been developed to identify and evaluate PSRs at work based on the Job Demands – Resources model², and informed by extensive research, it addresses gender, diversity and inclusion, as well as new ways of organising work, across five main areas, referred to as the ‘five Ws’: work content, working conditions, work organisation, work-life conditions and work/interpersonal relations. It helps organisations identify and analyse work-related PSRs to take preventive measures and support their well-being policies. As the introduction to the questionnaire states: ‘When workers feel good at work, this also has positive consequences for the organisation. This can manifest itself, for example, in lower turnover, reduced sickness absence, increased productivity, and enhanced creativity and innovation. They also have an additional advantage in attracting and retaining suitable and diverse profiles, given the “war for talent” that the labour market is experiencing (FPS Employment, 2023:6).

The questionnaire provides employers with the opportunity to assess all questions by gender and age, as disaggregated data on the workforce for these issues is typically held by employers. However, data is generally not collected or shared for other sensitive diversity issues, such as disability, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. To address this problem, the questionnaire covers topics such as gender, age, diversity, inclusion, and new ways of organising work, while ensuring anonymity and not collecting personal data. For example, under work organisation, questions cover communication, work-related communication risks, diversity and the environment, fair treatment, participation, leadership skills, structure, esteem, and a culture of well-being. The diversity questions, which require a response, are as follows:

- diversity is discussed openly;
- the working environment within my organisation is diversity-friendly;
- in my organisation, different lines of reasoning are valued;
- in my organisation, supervisors are visibly committed to diversity;
- in my organisation, part-time employees are taken into account.

It is recommended that participants choose to include these questions as a reference point on diversity in all sections of the questionnaire. In Part 9 of the questionnaire, respondents are asked whether they have been subjected to discrimination and/or inappropriate behaviour by people in their organisation (colleagues, supervisor, management) during the course of their work. Part 10 asks the same question but about third-party violence and harassment (TPVH) (customer, patient, student, bystander, supplier, subcontractor, contractor, etc.) during their work. The questions address, amongst other issues, discrimination based on being treated unfairly because of ‘who you are or because you have certain characteristics’, humiliating behaviours, bullying or harassment, swearing or verbal abuse, threats,

² According to the PSRs Guidelines the questionnaire is based on the theoretical framework used for this questionnaire, which is the Job Demands – Resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). It is based on the theory that workers’ psychosocial well-being or unwellness is determined by job characteristics that can be divided into obstacles and resources; work becomes a source of stress for an individual when there is an imbalance between demands and resources, i.e. when the demands of work exceed the resources of the individual.

physical violence, and sexual harassment. Assessing such issues at the company level has been crucial in raising awareness about discrimination in the workplace, as it is considered a PSR, and because it has links to anti-discrimination law.

When gender and/or diversity issues arise, the User Guide (FPS Employment, 2023b) recommends involving those affected by these issues in the working group(s) established to oversee PSR assessments, as well as in the preparation of the action plan and related decisions. Once the questionnaire has been completed, the data can be entered into an Excel template to process the information, enabling the calculation of average scores and the percentage of respondents with high or low scores.

In addition, FPS Employment provides expertise and support for this ongoing work, including on diversity:

- FPS Employment has created a website that publishes data, providing access to information collected by social security institutions, external prevention services, surveys, and other sources in digital form. It presents more than 500 indicators, divided into three main themes related to occupational risk, in the form of interactive graphs that allow the user to apply different filters (gender, age, industry, and years) to visualise and save the data.³
- The Belgian knowledge centre on well-being at work (Beswic), established by FPS Employment, provides resources and data to raise awareness about prevention initiatives, including those related to gender, violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It provides resources, webinars and access to reports on diversity.⁴
- FPS Employment conducts an annual report on diversity in the labour market as part of its role in socioeconomic monitoring, which is targeted at prevention advisors and other personnel responsible for occupational safety and health (OSH). It measures all aspects of diversity, including the criteria outlined in anti-discrimination laws, as well as the impact of long-term illnesses, disabilities, and sexual orientation (FPS Employment, 2024).
- Awareness raising for personnel involved in prevention initiatives and promoting workplace well-being have included seminars and conferences to discuss issues related to diversity, including a recent webinar on third-party aggression in the care sector, a workshop on online sexual violence at work⁵, and a webinar on new developments regarding PSRs, including violence and harassment at work.⁶ In order to implement the new regulations on protection against retaliation for victims of discrimination, on 30 May 2023, FPS Employment organised a webinar to raise awareness about how to prevent adverse measures for workers who report incidents of violence, harassment, or sexual harassment at work, including the extension of protection to workers experiencing discriminatory behaviour.⁷
- Workshops on the prevention of digital sexual violence at work were organised jointly by FPS Employment and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, under the framework of the National Action Plan to combat gender-based violence, 2021-2025. The workshops raised awareness about online and/or using technological applications such as smartphones, apps, or artificial intelligence, and in which not all parties involved fully consent, such as digital stalking and sharing and distributing nude images online. The workshops draw on case studies,⁸ which are published online, to help confidential counsellors and prevention advisors address the problem in the context of PSRs.

³ <https://data.risquesautravail.be/fr>.

⁴ <https://beswic.be/fr/search/site?term=diversity>.

⁵ <https://beswic.be/fr/actualites-et-evenements/revivez-la-matinee-detude-metoo-au-travail-ou-en-sommes-nous>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD8vPpTlJbE>.

⁷ Recording of the webinar, in Flemish [Webinar - Wijziging in de regelgeving psychosociale risico's](#) and in French: [Webinaire - Nouveautés dans la réglementation concernant les risques psychosociaux](#).

⁸ www.digitalseksueelgeweld.be.

FPS Employment demonstration projects on the prevention of PSRs

To develop knowledge and promote mutual learning, FPS Employment developed eleven one-year demonstration projects on the prevention of PSRs at work, under the framework of the Federal Action Plan 'Mental well-being at work', on the psychosocial well-being of employees. On 11 December 2023, FPS Employment presented a report⁹ evaluating the results of the projects, which covered PSRs in different sectors (metal, wood, construction, food, textiles, customised companies, electrical engineering, non-profit and family care).

One of the projects, with a clear link to diversity, illustrates how exposure to PSRs for one group of workers has benefited all workers' exposure to PSRs. The project has a clear link to diversity because it operates in a sector employing a high number of workers with diverse backgrounds, migrant women, ethnic minority women and women from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are exposed to poor working conditions and sexual harassment. The project, *ICOPA (VIVO): Preventing and controlling (sexually) transgressive behavior in the Flemish family care services to support the psychosocial well-being of workers* was run by the social partners within the Flemish family care services in response to the need to strengthen the family care services policy to prevent (sexually) transgressive behaviour, especially from third-party users/clients. The following tools were developed:

- Report including best practices, with an adaptation of existing reports, brochures, websites and the chat box 'Resilient working with transgressive and aggressive behaviour';
- Organisation of an exchange table and workshop on the subject;
- Training in collaboration with 'The Human Link';
- Learning package 'Resilient working with transgressive and aggressive behaviour' for frontline workers, and a work package.

Following a pilot of the project, the project was implemented across the sector. For further information on the tools developed, one of which is a risk assessment tool that addresses a range of PSR factors and includes questions on discrimination, visit: <https://www.icoba.be/>.

Example 2: Integration of diversity in the OiRA PSR tool

The second tool, the OiRA (Online Interactive Risk Assessment) tool on PSRs, was launched in 2024 to guide small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a step-by-step approach, covering the five 'Ws' developed by FPS Employment (see above). The tool helps users to assess PSRs and implement a well-being at work policy. It was created in collaboration with social partners, FPS Employment, legal specialists, labour inspectors, prevention advisors, and other representatives from the field. It is one of several user-friendly OiRA tools developed across various sectors.¹⁰

These tools are integrated into the national OSH strategy, particularly under Axis III of the National Strategy for Well-being at Work (2021-2027), and align with the Code on Well-being at Work. The questionnaire-based method for analysing PSRs enables employers to assess PSRs independently or in collaboration with a psychosocial prevention advisor. In particular, in implementing the tool, it is recommended that employers encourage active worker participation and establish a dialogue between workers and management. When risks have been identified, the tool assists in developing an action plan and producing a report, which can be downloaded and modified. The OiRA tool is a good example of an online risk assessment tool that incorporates diversity considerations in preventing PSRs at work (see box below). In addition, specific provisions on the prevention of PSRs at work are included on violence, or moral or sexual harassment at work. To date, the OiRA tool on PSRs is already showing some positive outcomes in terms of its usage and strong support from stakeholders, including labour inspectors.

⁹https://beswic.be/sites/default/files/public/content/download/files/NL/evaluatiebericht_betreffende_de_sectorprojecten_ter_preventie_van_psychosociale_risicos_op_het_werk_-_finaal.pdf.

¹⁰ Belgium has developed 35 OiRA tools in Dutch and French, covering various sectors, along with two thematic tools for COVID-19 and PSRs. For further information on the OiRA tools in Belgium see: https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Strategic-partnerships-implementation-promotion-OiRA-in-Belgium_EN.pdf.

Belgium: OiRA PSRs tool

Prevention of PSRs at work: diversity

- Ensure that internal communication takes into account the diversity of workers and partners;
- Treat workers equally and fairly; ensure diversity and inclusion;
- Ensuring fair treatment means managing relations with workers in an impartial, fair and equal manner;
- Each worker receives the same attention, is heard, receives remuneration commensurate with their work, has the same opportunities, and so on;
- Fair treatment fosters trust, a sense of belonging to the group and dedication to the company;
- Prejudice, unequal treatment, privileges and cronyism have no place here.
- Diversity can bring added value to the company;
- Does the company have a culture that is open to all and attentive to those who have more difficulties?

Further information:

- Equality and non-discrimination/Non-discrimination and diversity: general principles;
- UNIA: Discrimination criteria/Discrimination: a few details;
- eDiv: the online tool for greater inclusion and diversity at work.

Legal provisions:

- Law of 10 May 2007 to combat certain forms of discrimination (anti-discrimination law);
- Law of 10 May 2007 to combat discrimination between women and men (gender law);
- Law of 30 July 1981 to suppress certain acts inspired by racism and xenophobia (anti-racism law);
- Law of 4 August 1996 relating to the well-being of workers during the performance of their work
- Code of well-being at work.

Other diversity at work initiatives

Outside the specific OSH initiatives, a range of tools in Belgium is designed to support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace. They include the development and implementation of the Belgian Diversity Charter,¹¹ launched in 2025 as part of the EU Platform of Diversity Charters, to enable all Belgian enterprises and organisations, private and public, to initiate, develop and promote inclusive practices in the workplace. It acts as a mutual learning initiative and forum for networking through the European Network of Diversity Charters.

A further example is Unia, an independent, inter-federal public institution that fights discrimination and promotes equality. eDiv is a free online tool developed by Unia to support Belgian companies and public services in developing and monitoring an inclusive diversity policy. Any company can use it in any sector. eDiv¹² offers online resources for companies at various stages, from those just starting to those that have already integrated diversity and inclusion.

Success factors

- Overall, the Belgian legal framework for wellbeing at work and PSR assessment and prevention, along with the national plan to improve worker wellbeing and Belgium's ratification of ILO C190, have been important drivers for a proactive approach, leading to an innovative approach to preventing PSRs. The tools developed aim to ensure that PSRs do not escalate into more serious problems. They demonstrate a progressive approach to supporting this work through the use of a

¹¹ <https://diversitycharter.be/en/home>.

¹² www.ediv.be.

free, open-source tool and by building the capacities of employers, prevention advisors, confidential counsellors, and social partners, among other stakeholders.

- The PSR Questionnaire and User Guide exemplify an integrated approach, offering valuable resources to support the inclusion of diversity integration in PSR assessments, as part of the overall PSR assessment. The questionnaire is also helping to raise awareness about diversity, including inclusive dialogue and consultations with the full diversity of workers, recognising their experience and expertise, for example, in working groups and in developing action plans.
- The questionnaire and user guide are evidence-based, comprehensive, and have been widely tested in the field before being introduced. Indications are that employers are widely using it. FPS Employment has recognised the importance of developing diversity and gender-sensitive indicators for PSR assessments, drawing on sex- and diversity-disaggregated data. The emphasis placed on this in both the PSR questionnaire, PSR demonstration projects, and other online resources, as well as the annual data report on diversity by FPS Employment, is valuable in building knowledge and evidence in this regard.
- PSR sector initiatives have been supported through the PSR demonstration projects, funded by FPS Employment, which have played a crucial role in building knowledge and awareness around PSR and diversity-related issues. The example given of the Flemish family care service, which addresses sexually transgressive behaviour, illustrates the value of an approach to diversity that benefits all workers.
- The Belgian OiRA tool, developed through a tripartite approach, has been an essential resource for SMEs that often face significant challenges in implementing measures on workforce diversity as part of their PSR assessments. The tool exemplifies how diversity has been addressed comprehensively.
- In relation to both the PSR assessment questionnaire and the OiRA tool, they have proven to be valuable tools for primary prevention, aiming to encourage companies to address diversity-related issues such as discrimination, stress, violence, and harassment. Initial feedback from companies is that they are helping to promote the autonomy of the company to do the right thing. To date, there has been no evaluation of the tools' impacts, and it is hoped that this can be carried out in the future.
- There has been good collaboration with national equality actors, for example, as seen in the joint workshops on digital sexual harassment, and with employers through the implementation of the EU Diversity Charter in Belgium.

Challenges

- In Belgium, a lack of capacity amongst employers and prevention advisors, who are not diversity experts, remains a barrier to implementing diversity in PSR assessments.
- A key issue raised in a case study on the OiRA tool in Belgium (EU-OSHA, 2025b) is that the full implementation of risk assessment outcomes, with concrete actions, remains a challenge. This is particularly the case because many employers in small businesses lack the expertise and confidence to address PSRs, and solutions are not as straightforward to implement as traditional OSH measures. This is particularly the case with diversity issues.
- Although there is some overlap between well-being law and anti-discrimination laws, there is room for improvement in the coherence and mutually reinforcing approaches to workforce diversity and PSR prevention. Information is needed for employers on how to address both well-being and anti-discrimination issues in complementary ways.

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