

PREPS IN WOOD – PREVENTION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS IN THE WOOD INDUSTRIES IN BELGIUM

1 Overview

Country: Belgium

Name of the programme: PrePS in Wood (Prevention of Psychosocial Risks in the Wood Industries)

Organisations in charge: Woodwise, the training and prevention organisation for the wood sector in Belgium

Years of implementation: 2022-2023

Type of programme: Sectoral, with close involvement of social partners

Reach: A wide range of organisations and stakeholders

Target groups: All companies and workers in the wood industries

Interviewees: Six interviews were conducted: two with representatives from Woodwise (one a consultant specialising in human resources (HR) and the other specialising in safety and well-being); three with social partner representatives working at sectoral level and specialising in well-being and occupational safety and health (OSH); and one with a company-level representative responsible for HR and prevention.

Theory of change and intervention logic

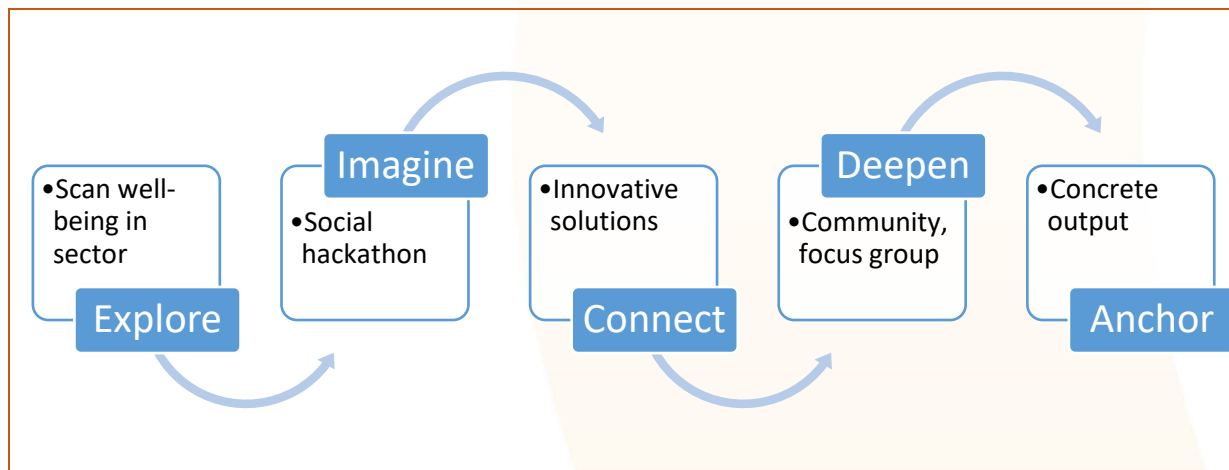
The PrePS in Wood project was designed and implemented following a theory of change approach, as illustrated in the figure below. More specifically, the objective was to raise awareness and provide support to improve the psychosocial well-being of workers and managers in the wood industries. To achieve this goal, the project set out to deliver a concrete output in the short term, in the form of a toolkit to be delivered by the end of the project (see the 'anchor' phase), while also recognising the need to scale up and achieve sustainable project results over the longer term.

This objective was determined on the basis of a needs assessment (see the 'explore' phase), which was partially implemented before the project started - by means of actions such as a survey targeting workers. The results of the survey provided the grounds for Woodwise to apply for government funding for the project, as well as guiding the first few months of project implementation. In the needs assessment, a variety of sources were used. This phase proved important to gain a full understanding of the problems faced by the sector, along with the underlying drivers and the groups most affected. It informed the choices that were made throughout the project, in terms of concepts such as key focus topics, target groups, the format of the project output and the implementation approach. The team further considered the different inputs required to deliver the desired outcomes. This aspect was addressed during the 'imagine' phase, when a Social Hackathon was held to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, from both within and outside the wood sector, to reflect on the challenges, opportunities and practices related to achieving the project goal. Together with the 'explore' phase, this stage was vital to map needs and resources.

The PrePS in Wood project team invested significant efforts in ensuring that all voices, such as workers, companies, social partners, inspectors and training providers, were heard. In addition to the Social Hackathon, PrePS in Wood used a focus group, designed to build a wider community around psychosocial well-being, while also working with four companies that served as pilot projects. This approach was designed to ensure that any direct feedback from the field was included in the final project outcome, and proved key to the project's success, both during and after implementation. For example,

the trade unions that participated in the project confirmed that they planned to continue raising awareness of the issues involved, both within and outside the wood sector. The PrePS in Wood project is widely acknowledged as a key step forward in addressing psychosocial risks and well-being at work in the sector.

Figure 1. PrePS in Wood: project implementation



Source: Woodwize (n.d.).

2 Context

The wood sector in Belgium

The Belgian wood and furniture sector is a diverse and dynamic industry, structured around two main joint committees:¹ (i) joint committee 125 for woodworking and furniture; and (ii) joint committee 126 for sawmills and forestry-related activities. These committees bring together nearly 2,000 companies employing over 16,000 workers.² The vast majority of these workers and companies belong to joint committee 125, whereas joint committee 126 includes about 570 companies and 3,600 workers. Together, these two sectors encompass a wide range of activities, including logging, sawmilling, panel manufacturing, production of construction elements and packaging, wood trading and furniture production. It is noteworthy that the wood sector in Belgium is male-dominated, involves physically demanding work and is strongly rooted in craftsmanship, while also being affected by technological change and the green transition.

Job quality in the wood sector

In the spring of 2021, the Flemish Foundation for Innovation and Work (*Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid Vlaanderen*, StIA), a research centre belonging to the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*, SERV), conducted a survey on job quality in the wood and furniture sector in collaboration with Woodwize and FBZ126.^{3 4} The survey specifically targeted manual workers in Flanders. The results for the sector were compared against benchmarks from the

¹ In Belgium, the social dialogue at sectoral level is organised into joint committees and subcommittees. Established under the Act of 5 December 1968 on collective bargaining and joint committees, such committees are composed of an equal number of representatives of employers' organisations and trade unions. Joint committees were created for all industries to group together companies with similar activities and to establish regulations tailored to their working conditions. Joint committees in Belgium are identified by their assigned number.

² Woodwize (n.d.). <https://woodwize.be/nl/>

³ FBZ126 is the Upholstery and Woodworking Security Fund. It is responsible for paying a wide range of social benefits to workers employed by companies belonging to joint committee 126. Employers can also benefit from certain benefits.

⁴ StIA (2022). *Hoe werkbaar zijn de jobs in de hout en meubelindustrie? Verslag van de sectorale werkbaarheidsmeting 2021 bij arbeiders uit PC126: Stofferij en houtbewerking [How workable are jobs in the wood and furniture industry? Report on the 2021 sectoral workability survey for workers from PC126: Upholstery and woodworking]*. https://www.serv.be/sites/default/files/documenten/StIA_20210110_Werkbaarheidsmeting_Meubelindustrie.pdf

broader Flemish labour market, particularly the results of the 2019 Workability Monitor (*Werkbaarheidsmonitor*)⁵ report produced by StIA.

The results for the wood sector showed that almost 54% of workers are employed in jobs that are not harmful to their health or well-being, are motivating, allow for personal development and provide a reasonable balance between work and private life. This is better than the average across all sectors in Flanders. Nevertheless, the results still imply that a significant proportion of workers face challenges. More specifically, about 25% of workers in the wood and furniture sector said that they struggle with job stress (with about 8% presenting signs of burnout), while 24% reported motivational issues (around 8% consider themselves strongly demotivated) and 27% mentioned limited learning opportunities. In contrast, work-life balance issues were found to affect only 5% of respondents.

In the StIA 2022 study, several job characteristics were found to affect job quality in the wood sector. First, 36% of workers reported exposure to physically strenuous working conditions, a much higher figure than the overall benchmark for Flanders (15%). Second, 27% of workers in the wood sector reported a high workload. Although this is lower than the average across all sectors in Flanders, it remains a concern for the sector. Third, 29% of workers perform routine tasks, which limit both motivation and learning opportunities. Here, the wood sector performs worse than the average across all sectors in Flanders. In addition, about 30% of workers lack autonomy in their roles, which again is worse than the Flemish average of 19%. Finally, 17% of workers reported insufficient coaching or support from their direct supervisor, and only 17% had participated in training in the past year. At the same time, 68% of workers felt that they could continue working in their current role until retirement, which is higher than the average across all sectors in Flanders (62%). In the same survey, about 11% of workers indicated that they were exposed to work-related bullying, violence and harassment, which is on par with results for other sectors in Flanders.

Across different subgroups – based on the age, educational level or job role of workers, company size and subsector – there were no significant differences in relation to job quality. However, some differences emerged for specific risk factors. More specifically, physically demanding work is more prevalent among younger workers and workers in production. The latter group also reported more limited autonomy and higher levels of routine work. Moreover, young workers are also subject to higher workloads than other age groups. Finally, workers in larger companies (those with more than 250 employees) reported, on average, higher workloads and more limited autonomy than their counterparts in smaller organisations.

Although the wood sector performs better than other sectors in several areas, the abovementioned challenges reveal issues regarding working and employment conditions in the sector, including in relation to psychosocial risks.

Policy context

Psychosocial risks and mental health issues and awareness hereof have increased in Belgium in recent decades and, accordingly, policymakers have placed greater focus on these issues.⁶ This trend has been linked to significant changes in job content, working environment and working conditions – due to digitalisation, demographic change and other megatrends accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis – and a well-established regulatory framework that has led to greater awareness and increased reporting of such issues. Psychosocial risks and well-being have been at the top of the policy agenda, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this context, four ministers jointly launched the federal action plan on mental well-being at work (MWOHW/BEMAT) in 2021. As part of this plan, the Federal Public Service (FPS) Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue was tasked with 13 actions, structured around three main objectives: (i) to raise awareness of the roles of different actors working on psychosocial risks and well-being; (ii) to assess and improve the existing regulatory framework; and (iii) to develop tools for practitioners. With regard to the third objective, a series of pilot projects was initiated. The PrePS in Wood project discussed here

⁵ Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid (2019). *Werkbaarheidsmonitor 2019*. Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (SERV). <https://www.serv.be/stichting/publicatie/werkbaarheidsmonitor-2019-werknemers>

⁶ Lenaerts, K. and Gillis, D. (2025). *Psychosocial risk prevention – strategies and legislation – Belgium, National report, EU-OSHA*. https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/belgium-psychosocial-risk-prevention-strategies-legislation_EN.pdf

was one of the sector-specific projects that received a grant to develop tools aimed at preventing psychosocial risks at work (overseen by the National Labour Council).

To be eligible for funding, project proposals had to be submitted by either a company or a sector, in the latter case subject to the formal approval of the relevant joint committee. Funding was reserved for projects that adopted an integrated and multidisciplinary approach, involving various stakeholders in design and implementation. In addition, projects were required to address the topic from multiple angles, taking into account job content, work organisation, working conditions, employment conditions and interpersonal relations (according to the so-called '5 A's'⁷; see Act of 4 August 1996 on the well-being of workers in the performance of their work, Belgian Official Gazette, 1996), rather than focusing on a single factor.

Projects could include phases such as raising awareness, identifying and applying preventive measures – especially in relation to training, awareness and leadership – and evaluating those measures. Other key conditions for projects included a focus on primary prevention, involvement of a qualified external facilitator, inclusion of collective actions, innovativeness and avoiding duplication of existing efforts or initiatives.

The PrePS in Wood project

Woodwize, with the joint committee's approval, submitted a proposal in response to the call for pilot projects launched by the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue. This became the PrePS in Wood (Prevention of Psychosocial Risks in the Wood Industries in Belgium) project. Funding for the project thus came mainly from the FPS grant, with additional contributions from the sector itself. Some costs, such as those associated with the Quicksan tool, which is offered free of charge and is currently still being maintained by Woodwize even though the PrePS in Wood project has ended, could not be covered by the project and were thus borne by the sector.

The project was established at sectoral level and relied heavily on the involvement of social partners, for example via their role in joint committees, but also on other stakeholders such as external prevention services, labour inspectors and representatives from other sectors (e.g. federations). Most of these stakeholders participated in the Social Hackathon and/or focus group, which meant that they closely followed developments within the PrePS in Wood project. In addition, a PrePS in Wood community was launched to bring together all interested parties and keep them informed about progress via a newsletter. As further discussed below, the involvement of companies and stakeholders not only helped improve the quality and relevance of the project output but also contributed to its subsequent adoption and ownership.

Although the StIA 2022 study had revealed that the situation in the wood and furniture sector was not as problematic as in other sectors, it still uncovered several factors associated with poorer job quality and affecting the psychosocial well-being of workers.

However, there is a chance that psychosocial risks and well-being issues may be overlooked in the wood and furniture sector, especially considering that many jobs still involve physically demanding and dangerous work. As a result, when it comes to occupational safety and health risk prevention and management, most companies tend to prioritise safety and ergonomics. Since the majority of companies in the sector are small and medium-sized enterprises, procedures and practices related to psychosocial risks and worker well-being are largely limited to what employers are legally required to do. A number of tools are available (e.g. OiRA),⁸ but even those that include information on psychosocial risks focus more on broader OSH. Moreover, some stakeholders consulted for this study

⁷ The '5 A's' are the five key areas of psychosocial risk in Belgium's workplace well-being legislation: *Arbeidsorganisatie* (organisation of work), *Arbeidsinhoud* (job content), *Arbeidsvoorwaarden* (employment conditions), *Arbeidsomstandigheden* (working conditions) and *Arbeidsverhoudingen* (interpersonal relationships).

⁸ OiRA stands for Online interactive Risk Assessment. The OiRA platform was developed by EU-OSHA and is available free of charge to EU Member States. [OiRA Hout](#) (OiRA Wood), launched in 2014, was the second OiRA tool made available in Belgium. The content of the tool was developed by FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue in close cooperation with sectoral partners and with support from Prevent, an external prevention service. The OiRA Hout tool is designed for all companies in the wood industry, in the subsectors of forestry, sawmills, wood trade, furniture industry, packaging pallets and building elements. The tool includes eight modules, covering the following areas: (i) machinery (machine safety); (ii) electricity, fire and explosion; (iii) wood dust; (iv) hazardous products; (v) physical stress; (vi) infrastructure; (vii) organisation of prevention; and (viii) psychosocial risks.

mentioned that, in cases where employers did include psychosocial risks in their risk assessment, there was often only limited follow-up.

With the increased focus on psychosocial risks and well-being in policy and the public debate, the interest in bringing this topic to the forefront in the wood sector gained momentum. However, Woodwize recognised that, although raising awareness was a first critical step, the scope had to be broad in terms of the risks to be covered and target audiences, and the tools to be developed had to be as user friendly as possible (e.g. low barriers to participation, easy and cost-effective to apply). In addition, and as underlined by the stakeholders interviewed, PrePS in Wood drew lessons from previous projects, such as the importance of integrating prevention as part of the company culture.

Box 1: Monitoring of trends in job quality in the wood sector

Before presenting further details of the PrePS in Wood project, it is important to situate it within the framework of Woodwize's work. Every three years, a survey on job quality is conducted together with StIA (see, for example, the abovementioned survey conducted in 2021). A central concept in StIA's work is *werkbaarheid*, or 'workability', which is understood as jobs that are not detrimental to the health or well-being of workers, and moreover are motivating, allow for personal development and offer a reasonable balance between work and private life. The *werkbaarheid* concept is well known and frequently used in Flanders. Woodwize has dedicated programmes on this topic, for example when companies seek guidance on job redesign initiatives, work organisation or worker autonomy. Although PrePS in Wood is somewhat separate from those programmes, in practice they are linked, as some of the topics addressed overlap. In addition, some companies in the wood sector have shown interest in participating in an intersectoral training programme organised by SERV. The Woodwize team is proactively following up with those organisations to plan visits and potentially initiate a process to provide long-term support.

3 Description of the activities implemented at sectoral level

3.1 Actors, roles and activities implemented

Actors and roles

PrePS in Wood was initiated by Woodwize, the training and prevention organisation for the Belgian wood and furniture industry. Established in 1988 as the Wood Training Centre (*OpleidingsCentrum Hout*) by social partners in the sector, this organisation was created to improve entry into the sector's workforce through collaboration with educational institutions and the Flemish public employment service (VDAB). As technological changes accelerated and international competition intensified, Woodwize broadened its scope to include skills development, retraining and job placement services. In 2017, this development was formalised with a new name, Woodwize, and a renewed mission.

Woodwize's mission is to support companies in the wood industries to help them become more sustainable by offering targeted training, professional advice and practical guidance to both businesses and current or aspiring workers. The organisation strives to strengthen individual talent and help create satisfying work environments. Its vision is to serve as a forerunner for sustainable employment practices within the sector. To this end, it focuses on improving the attractiveness of the sector, supporting worker mobility within the sector and preventing premature departures from the workforce.

Woodwize structures its work across four key areas: (i) training and skills development; (ii) bridging the gap between education and employment; (iii) promoting workplace safety and well-being; and (iv) offering HR support. In the first area, Woodwize collaborates with leading training institutions and offers its own courses. It supports companies in identifying training needs, setting learning objectives and organising training programmes accordingly, as well as offering a digital tool to help companies track their training costs. In the second area, it promotes the wood and furniture sectors in secondary and higher education, offers guidance on study programmes and helps arrange company visits and internships. It also supports dual learning trajectories and highlights options for tertiary education and

adult learning in the wood and furniture sector. In the third area, Woodwize provides hands-on support with risk assessments and prevention plans, clarifies changes in the applicable regulatory framework, organises workshops and facilitates the sharing of best practices. Finally, in HR support, it offers companies tailored support on recruitment, onboarding, competence mapping, career development and related topics.

As discussed below, PrePS in Wood was implemented mostly by Woodwize, but with the support of a wide range of stakeholders. Within the organisation, a working group made up of four staff members was formed. Importantly, four companies were involved as pilot projects, which was critical for validating and fine-tuning the materials developed. In addition, the Woodwize team benefited from the support of a specialised facilitator. Representatives from the social partners – unions and employers' organisations – participated in the Social Hackathon and focus group and provided support to raise awareness of the project and its output. These efforts are still ongoing, even though the formal project ended a few years ago. The collaboration between all parties involved was deemed to be smooth and constructive.

Activities implemented

The PrePS in Wood project ran from 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023. Almost all activities had concluded by the summer of 2023. The main activities are presented below, in chronological order.

September 2022 – November 2022

In the first three months of project implementation, Woodwize focused on laying the groundwork for the project's content by identifying key challenges and priorities related to psychosocial health and well-being. This included desk research aimed at gathering relevant information and data, a survey among companies on their experiences with psychosocial well-being, and a SWOT analysis on existing practices around psychosocial well-being in the wood and furniture sector. This groundwork guided all subsequent project steps.

The organisation of a Social Hackathon in November 2022 was a major milestone during this period. It was set up as participatory event that brought together a broad range of stakeholders from across the wood sector and beyond – around 80 participants in total. This included social partners, external prevention services, insurance companies, prevention advisors (including some specialising in psychosocial risks), workers and supervisors, business owners and managers, labour inspectors, and representatives from other sectors. During the Social Hackathon, participants contributed a wide variety of creative and practical ideas aimed at improving well-being at work. One of the reasons the event was perceived as a success is that it featured personal testimonies and company experiences, which made the topic more relatable. A video summary is available on the PrePS in Wood website.⁹

The Social Hackathon served not only as a brainstorming platform to gather insights from multiple disciplines, but also as the starting point for the PrePS in Wood community, which includes all individuals and organisations engaged in the project, forming a collaborative network committed to fostering well-being in the sector. This community brought together individuals and stakeholders with an interest in following the project and involved regular progress updates via email. In addition, participants for the focus group and the pilot projects in companies were identified and recruited during the Social Hackathon.

December 2022 – May 2023

These initial steps formed the basis for the next phase of the project, during which the PrePS in Wood focus group was established. This group included the original working group and 19 volunteer stakeholders identified during the Social Hackathon. Over the course of five months, it met four times to refine, expand and test the initial concepts, gradually shaping them into concrete, usable tools. 'Initial concepts' here refers to draft versions of the various tools that subsequently composed the toolkit. This was an iterative process.

One critical part of this period was the testing of the toolkit at four companies through pilot projects. More specifically, these pilots served as real-world testing grounds for the tools in the toolkit as they were being developed. For example, early paper-based versions of the online Quickscore assessment were used at the pilot companies to validate the tool (see below). Feedback gathered from the

⁹ Woodwize (25 November 2022). *PrePS in Wood - Social Hackathon 25 11 22 (NL)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zWfRQyc3tI>

companies, combined with insights from the focus group, was then used to fine-tune the tools and ensure they were effective and applicable to various workplace contexts. Members of the focus group were also invited to visit these pilot companies to see the PrePS in Wood project in action.

May 2023 – August 2023

During the final months of project implementation, the final versions of the tools and the toolkit were developed and consolidated into a tangible output. This included a promotion and scaling-up plan to ensure that the results could be adopted more broadly across the sector.

The final version of the toolkit was officially presented on 29 August 2023 at the PrePS in Wood closing event, which marked both the conclusion of the project's development phase and the beginning of a new chapter, during which companies were encouraged to actively use the toolkit.

Box 2: The participative and appreciative approach at the heart of the PrePS in Wood project

The PrePS in Wood project emphasises a participative and appreciative approach, engaging a broad network of stakeholders in an inclusive process, as described above. During the interviews, participants frequently mentioned how the openness of the PrePS in Wood process fosters the engagement of interested parties. Unions, for example, reported that trade union representatives from companies not directly involved in the project were still invited to participate in company site visits and project events and meetings, which was highly appreciated.

The underlying method is based on the appreciative inquiry model, which seeks to identify strengths, positive experiences and effective practices rather than focusing on problems. For example, while survey questions normally tend to be formulated in a negative way (e.g. 'Are you being bullied?'), this type of approach was explicitly avoided in the development of the Quickscore tool. Instead, the PrePS in Wood project is designed to be non-threatening, accessible and motivational, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (e.g. answer options are organised from positive to negative and from green to red; examples of statements include 'I collaborate well with my colleagues so that we can achieve good results as a team', 'I experience good collaboration with clients and/or third parties (e.g. suppliers, subcontractors) and I know why third parties are involved', 'I feel reassured in my job security' and 'I experience a good balance between work and private life'), and to provide a pathway from awareness to action. On this latter point, Woodwise works to offer concrete recommendations, including quick wins, while emphasising the importance of following through with actions once issues have been mapped.

This appreciative approach was used in every aspect of the project, including the way in which Woodwise engaged with the pilot companies. The team was mindful of the time commitment of managers and workers and sought to ensure that the programme was not perceived as demanding or intrusive.

3.2 Results and outcomes

The psychosocial well-being toolkit

The main output of PrePS in Wood was the psychosocial well-being toolkit, developed by Woodwise in close collaboration with all project participants. This toolkit aims to provide a step-by-step approach to improving psychosocial well-being in the workplace, a structured approach that minimizes the risk of offering too much information at once, which can overwhelm and confuse users.

The psychosocial well-being toolkit is designed to help companies of all sizes in the sector take concrete actions towards building a healthier working environment. Tools cover a range of topics relevant to well-being at work, such as communication, leadership and team dynamics. The toolkit is designed to be adaptable, thereby allowing companies to implement the tools in the most appropriate way for their unique context and needs.

The toolkit consists of 10 tools, each with a specific purpose and application:

1. Guide to psychosocial well-being:

This guide consists of a manual, tailored for both workshop and office environments, which

discusses common misconceptions and the persistent taboos surrounding psychosocial well-being. It outlines the importance of psychosocial well-being for individuals and teams and offers guidance on how to begin addressing this issue within an organisation (PrePS in Wood guide, 2023). It comprises 80 pages and is organised into three parts.

The first part is organised around the question ‘What is psychosocial well-being?’, and presents definitions, situates psychosocial well-being in the current legal framework and in the OSH risk prevention and management cycle, explains the 5 A’s (job content, working conditions, employment conditions, organisation of work and interpersonal relationships) and provides links to materials for further reading.

The second part of the guidebook addresses why improving psychosocial well-being matters and discusses the positive effects on workers and companies.

The third part focuses on how improved psychosocial well-being can be achieved. It presents a stepwise approach comprising four steps – intention, engagement, action and results – and explains how to approach each step. For intention, for example, it sets out a brainstorming exercise for managers or working groups at company level. The guidebook suggests questions that can help kick-start this exercise, e.g. ‘Who should be involved in helping improve psychosocial well-being?’, thereby helping companies make the discussion more concrete. For engagement, the guidebook discusses the importance of addressing psychosocial well-being not only from a risk-based perspective, but also from a more appreciative and participatory perspective. To this end, it provides a plan with seven steps that companies can follow. In the section on action, the guidebook discusses topics such as the use of Quickscan, meetings on well-being, the importance of leadership and the importance of involving all relevant actors. Finally, the part on results emphasises the importance of celebrating what the company has achieved in terms of improving psychosocial well-being.

The final part of the guidebook provides a more in-depth understanding of the wider context of the wood sector, with information on the labour market more generally and reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It also contains testimonials, infographics and other supporting materials.

2. Awareness and activation materials:

After reading the guide, companies can use a presentation and flyer to raise awareness and initiate actions within their organisation and teams. Both resources are intended to facilitate internal communication and build momentum around the topic.^{10 11} The materials are written in an accessible, easy-to-understand way.

3. Quickscan well-being:

A free online self-assessment tool, Quickscan includes 25 statements based on the ‘5 A’s’, which form part of the legal framework around psychosocial risks at work in Belgium. The scan is designed to involve business managers or owners, supervisors and workers in evaluating psychosocial well-being within the organisation. Survey questions are designed in such a way that they can be addressed by anyone, regardless of their role in the organisation (e.g. office vs. workshop). The survey is anonymous, but participants can use the open questions to provide more detailed or personal information if they wish. Importantly, Quickscan is not a formal risk assessment,¹² nor is it intended to serve as one.

Participating companies first receive a summary of the survey results in the form of a colour-coded chart, which highlights the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses. A more detailed report follows later (see step 4). The survey is designed so that anyone within the organisation, regardless of their role, can respond. The results may be analysed collectively or separately by role, depending on what has been agreed between the company and the Woodwise team. In

¹⁰ Woodwise (2023). *PrePS in Wood flyer*. https://woodwise.be/upload/docs/2023_WOODWISE_Folder_PrePSinWOOD_01.pdf

¹¹ Woodwise (2023). *PrePS in Wood presentation*. https://woodwise.be/upload/docs/PPT_Sensibilising_NL.pdf

¹² In formal risk assessments, employers must identify any situation that could give rise to psychosocial risks. Psychosocial risks, however, are only one of seven domains that should be covered in such assessments. As mentioned in the interviews, when employers rely on an external prevention service for risk assessment, this can be expensive and may limit companies’ ability to follow up on the findings. Quickscan, by contrast, is easy, fast and free of charge, and allows companies to easily zoom in on psychosocial risks and well-being within their organisation.

all cases, the presentation of the results is carefully tailored to ensure confidentiality, which is particularly important given the high number of small enterprises in the sector. Confidentiality is a key consideration throughout the data collection, analysis and reporting process, and Woodwize is highly attentive to this aspect. The organisation also provides substantial support in interpreting the results and identifying concrete follow-up actions.

4. First-line advice for business managers:

As the fourth step, business managers or owners receive a more in-depth report that provides first-line advice, which can be used to guide discussions and subsequent steps. Woodwize is available to provide further clarification on the Quickscan results. An important aspect here is that Woodwize uses the survey results to propose targeted improvements. In doing so, the aim is to include 'quick wins' – quick, visible actions that are straightforward to implement and have an immediate impact – as well as measures that require more time or resources. A key point, however, is that when companies undertake the survey, follow-up is crucial. One stakeholder interviewed underlined that a lack of follow-up undermines trust and engagement among the workforce.

5. Well-being conversation guide:

To complement the Quickscan results, Woodwize encourages organisations to hold conversations with their workers to gain deeper insights and clarify priorities. Detailed instructions on how to approach this are provided in the PrePS in Wood guide (2023). Practical support on initiating and conducting these discussions is available from Woodwize. Examples include suggestions on how to arrange meetings in terms of venues and other arrangements, information on the preparation required by managers and workers, suggestions on how to start meetings (e.g. questions to ask to open the conversation), and ideas on how to handle difficult questions or issues.

6. Conversation cards:

A set of five conversation cards is available to facilitate dialogue between managers and workers on well-being. The cards are made accessible to organisations once the Quickscan process has been completed. The idea is that managers hold one-to-one conversations with their workers (see point 5), during which they go over the results for the entire company together and managers ask workers if they have any specific questions or points to add in relation to certain results. This tool can prove useful in situations where psychosocial risks and their consequences are difficult to discuss. Even when a company performs relatively well overall, such conversations can help uncover underlying issues, such as when one person disagrees with the work schedule and struggles with work-life balance issues, while almost no other workers find it problematic. These cards are intended to be used as a way to kick-start one-to-one conversations.

7. Tips for workers:

A series of reflective tips is available to help workers prepare for well-being conversations with their supervisors. These tips are aligned with the themes of the 25 Quickscan statements and aim to support a constructive dialogue.

8. Code of conduct:

A sample code of conduct is included in the toolkit to emphasise core values such as professionalism, respect and appreciation. This sample can be downloaded from the PrePS in Wood website and can be used during onboarding, added to internal policies or integrated into team discussions to promote a culture of respect to support the well-being of the workforce.

9. Training and support for appreciative leadership:

One of the challenges identified by Woodwize concerned leadership in the sector, and in relation to this, communication between workers and managers. To tackle this issue, the toolkit also includes training sessions and practical support aimed at developing appreciative leadership practices, an approach based on mutual respect and positive reinforcement.

10. Database of psychosocial well-being tools:

As the final tool in the toolkit, additional information materials are available on the PrePS in Wood website, which provides access to a range of tools and resources aimed at improving psychosocial well-being at work. It includes references to materials that have been developed by Woodwize or that specifically target the sector, as well as other materials and projects targeting workers and managers. Examples include checklists and tools prepared by FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue,¹³ the burnout assessment tool developed at KU Leuven¹⁴ and references to videos prepared by SERV.¹⁵ This collection is continuously updated, and suggestions for additional tools are welcomed. As of July 2025, the collection included 69 entries.

Project reach and follow-up

The PrePS in Wood project targeted all companies and workers in the wood and furniture sector in Belgium. Throughout its implementation, several companies and workers were directly engaged. In addition, the toolkit is available to anyone interested in improving psychosocial well-being at work.

There was a consensus among all stakeholders interviewed that PrePS in Wood was successful in several ways. Awareness of psychosocial risks and well-being is growing in the sector, albeit slowly. Similarly, both the Woodwize team and other stakeholders interviewed reported that the toolkit is still being promoted and used, and that they regularly receive requests for support from companies and workers. According to one stakeholder interviewed, this is a key element, especially considering that the wood and furniture sector is often seen as a male-dominated environment with a traditional focus on physical risk prevention. In such settings, topics such as psychosocial well-being can be difficult to raise, as mentioned across all interviews. However, PrePS in Wood successfully started breaking down these barriers and highlighted to employers that investing in well-being is not just about caring, but also about productivity and sustainability. There was a strong emphasis on prevention, with early action rather than reactive responses being encouraged.

Despite this success, several challenges persist, particularly around understanding the causes of long-term illnesses such as burnout and depression, as pointed out by several interviewees. These issues are difficult to tackle in a structured way, because not enough workers or employers actively engage with the tools and interventions available. Stakeholders pointed out the need to move towards broader active implementation across the wood and furniture sector and deeper integration at company level. According to many of the stakeholders consulted, this is complicated by the sensitive nature of psychosocial well-being. Workers may hesitate to open up because of the perceived stigma.

Since the PrePS in Wood project ended in the summer of 2023, Woodwize, together with the joint committees, has continued to monitor use of the toolkit, and the project is regularly discussed at joint committee meetings. According to several interviewees consulted for this study, communication was handled well, both during and after the project. Interested stakeholders could subscribe to mailing lists, and updates were regularly provided on progress, subsequent steps and outputs. This ensured that companies remained informed and engaged, while also motivating trade union representatives to promote and support the initiative at company level. In addition, there are plans to invite the focus group to a meeting to discuss progress since the project ended and potential future actions.

Finally, developments in psychosocial risks and well-being in the wood sector are also being closely monitored by Woodwize and the joint committees, for example through the regular StIA survey. One of the key advantages of this is that it facilitates comparisons between the results for the wood sector and those for all sectors in Flanders (benchmarks are available).

¹³ EU-OSHA (2014). *OiRA Hout: Tool voor identificatie en beoordeling van risico's [OiRA Wood: Tool for identifying and assessing risks]*. <https://beswic.be/nl/themas/psychosociale-risicos-psr>

¹⁴ Schaufeli, W. B., Desart, S., and De Witte, H. (2020). Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) – Development, validity and reliability. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 9495. <https://burnoutassessmenttool.be/>

¹⁵ Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (n.d.). *Werkbaar werk [Videos]*. <https://www.werkbaarwerk.be/werkbaarwerk>

4 Success factors and barriers

4.1 Success factors

Throughout the interviews, several success factors were identified. Some of these factors related to the process – how the project was designed and implemented – while others focused more on the content.

A key strength of PrePS in Wood was its appreciative, welcoming and interactive approach. Instead of focusing on problems, the project aimed to highlight opportunities, showcase good practices and open up discussions on the topic of psychosocial risks and well-being. This constructive tone helped foster trust and motivation among participants. Furthermore, the project ensured strong engagement at every stage among all relevant actors, such as workers, managers, employers and union representatives. Importantly, involvement was not limited to companies directly involved in PrePS in Wood or to stakeholders working directly in the wood and furniture industries but extended to actors such as trade union representatives working in related sectors, training providers covering several sectors and labour inspectors. This contributed to the project's transferability and relevance to other sectors, as discussed below. Finally, the involvement of an external facilitator proved crucial in guiding the process. Several interviewees mentioned that this individual was very professional, understood the sector extremely well and took a highly engaging approach overall, as well as being kind and approachable, which created a positive atmosphere during events and, more generally, over the course of project implementation.

Building on this approach, another strength of the PrePS in Wood project was that it successfully addressed the often sensitive topic of psychosocial well-being by creating an open, inclusive environment where all stakeholders felt heard and respected. From the very beginning, there was a strong willingness to engage with the issue, breaking the taboos that frequently surround mental health at work. This openness helped normalise conversations about well-being and paved the way for a cultural shift at company level.

Another point that came up in all interviews is that PrePS in Wood delivered a comprehensive yet practical toolkit that addressed a broad range of themes related to psychosocial risks. Stakeholders particularly appreciated that the tools were adapted to the realities of both large and small companies, as well as to all workers. For smaller businesses in particular, the toolkit's design offered anonymity and external processing of survey responses, which is carried out by Woodwize and not by the companies involved, an approach that reassured participants and encouraged open participation. A key strength is that the toolkit focused on reducing barriers to addressing and discussing these issues. A final point mentioned in several interviews as a strength was the support Woodwize offers to companies to guide them through processes such as specific project steps.

4.2 Barriers

Despite the positive reception of the PrePS in Wood project, several obstacles remain regarding its widespread adoption and implementation.

First of all, as pointed out in all interviews, psychosocial well-being is often still seen as a secondary concern, especially at smaller companies, where the business manager or owner often assumes multiple roles, including those of HR and prevention advisor. In such settings, time and operational pressures make it difficult to engage with preventive tools, even when there is goodwill.

While the financial aspect could be perceived as a barrier, in practice it seemed to play a somewhat smaller role than expected. This was because the PrePS in Wood project received funding from the government and joint committees, thus making all tools available to companies free of charge.

The real challenge lies in keeping the topic visible and relevant yet unobtrusive. According to the stakeholder interviews, although awareness of the toolkit exists, actual usage by small and medium companies is limited, with only a small percentage of those companies completing it fully (i.e. all steps). In contrast, larger companies tend to be more familiar with such tools and better equipped to act on them. This challenge was reported not just by Woodwize, but also by other actors working in the sector.

This highlights the need for ongoing, tailored support to bring psychosocial prevention into focus in a sustainable, accessible way. This challenge is not exclusive to the wood sector or to PrePS in Wood.

5 Lessons learned

The PrePS in Wood project has revealed strong potential for transferability across sectors, and its use has already extended beyond the wood and furniture industry. From the outset, the tools were designed to be open, accessible and adaptable, thereby allowing companies in other sectors to engage with them effectively. Representatives from industries such as the electricity sector (e.g. Volta)¹⁶ were involved early on, and social partners, including trade unions, are exploring how the toolkit can also be implemented in other contexts.

While the core components of PrePS in Wood are widely applicable, some interviewees argued that, to make transferability work, some sector-specific adaptation might be required. For example, it is important to consider differences in company size, organisational culture and available resources, as well as aspects related to the different risks in different sectors, such as those that deal with the public/clients. When tools are perceived as too generic, they may become undervalued or underused. This point was also raised in relation to PrePS in Wood, especially concerning the collection of additional information products (tool 10 of the toolkit).

In addition, the PrePS in Wood toolkit is available for free, unlike other tools and interventions, including formal risk assessments, which are normally carried out by external OSH service providers. While this is positive, the fact that the PrePS in Wood materials are provided free of charge may lead users to perceive them as poor quality, which, according to interviewees, could lead to such materials being undervalued and/or underused. Therefore, a key point for future development is clear communication of the toolkit's value.

A final key lesson from the PrePS in Wood project is the importance of the process, in terms of the concrete steps it entails, as well as its management and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders at each and every step. In this sense, the developmental phase not only produced valuable outcomes such as the tools but also created strong awareness and engagement across a broad audience. Furthermore, the effectiveness of interventions depends not only on initial use but also on continued follow-up, which remains an area for improvement. Moreover, this should be kept in mind when new projects, interventions or actions are planned.

Despite the challenges, broader societal trends, such as increased awareness of the importance of a work-life balance, are making psychosocial well-being a more visible and pressing issue across all sectors (see also StIA, 2022), as explicitly mentioned in many of the interviews conducted for this study. As the PrePS in Wood experience shows, even in cases where psychosocial risks may not appear as pressing or are often overlooked because of a traditionally higher focus on physical risks, momentum to address this topic can be created with strong stakeholder involvement.

6 Implementation of the measures at company level

6.1 Company involved

For the purposes of this study, one of the four companies that participated in the PrePS in Wood pilot projects was consulted. This process provided a good understanding of how companies experienced project implementation and of the continued use of the toolkit and the project's impact since it ended. In the following sections, the company is reported on in an anonymised manner.

The company in question is a well-established, family-owned business that employs around 15 staff members and operates with a clear internal, almost horizontal structure to support smooth coordination from concept to completion. The showroom team includes three interior architects who translate client wishes into creative, functional designs. Once a project is approved, two experienced project managers ensure a seamless transition to execution, overseeing technical planning and coordination. A dedicated planner handles scheduling, materials procurement and service requests, playing a central role in coordinating different departments.

¹⁶ Volta is the sectoral organisation established by social partners to serve companies and employees from joint subcommittee 149.01 (electricity sector).

Production is carried out in a separate, well-equipped workshop by four skilled craftsmen, one of whom is focused entirely on after-sales service and repairs. Installation is managed by a team of three fitters. This clear division of roles ensures that each project phase is handled with care and expertise.

Although the showroom, workshop and field teams are physically located in different places, the company makes a conscious effort to foster communication and cohesion. Regular meetings help ensure alignment between departments and maintain a client-oriented workflow.

6.2 Actions implemented at company level

The company in question played an active, engaged role throughout the development of the PrePS in Wood project, contributing at multiple key stages. Its involvement began in September 2022, when it was invited to participate in the Social Hackathon organised by Woodwize. One interviewee pointed out that this invitation attracted the company's attention because the topic of psychosocial well-being is important to the company and closely aligned with its values. At the same time, however, the company realised that, with regard to OSH risk prevention and management, the focus to date had mostly been on safety and physical risk prevention.

After the Social Hackathon, interested stakeholders were invited by Woodwize to join the focus group. Since the Social Hackathon had been an inspirational, well-organised event, the company volunteered to become a member of the focus group, helping shape the tools developed as part of the PrePS in Wood project. As a member of the focus group, the company's representatives participated in several meetings.

During the next phase, when the project team was looking for companies to run pilot projects to test and validate the toolkit in practice, the company again volunteered to participate, along with three other organisations. The company chose to apply the tools across all departments, with a clear emphasis on minimising disruption to daily operations and respecting workers' time and capacity.

Its participation in the pilot began in April 2023 with a Quicksan assessment conducted by two Woodwize staff members. To ensure a smooth experience for workers, the scan was carried out on site and in paper format. It is important to note that all workers completed the survey anonymously. The main results were analysed and shared the same day and discussed with the owner and the person responsible for HR and prevention, thus allowing the company to directly follow up and implement a number of 'quick wins'. These included practical changes such as installing a wireless phone in the showroom, adding a bicycle parking area for workshop staff and improving internal information and communications technology (ICT) support. The company also received a more detailed report with additional recommendations at a later date.

Following the Quicksan assessment, the company initiated a second phase of activities involving individual feedback conversations. The conversations were led by the owner and the person responsible for HR and prevention, who received guidance from Woodwize on the best approach to adopt in this regard. Using structured discussion cards based on the '5 A's' well-being model, individual workers received insight on the Quicksan results at company level – based not on their own survey results but on the anonymised and aggregated results for the entire company – and were then able to express their thoughts or concerns around these results. This enabled them to provide feedback or clarify certain findings. One interviewee confirmed that these conversations helped identify strengths and stress points in a constructive and supportive way.

A few months later, the company organised a team-wide feedback and teambuilding session, using a participatory approach. A large process map was laid out, enabling each department to identify its roles, challenges and opportunities – for example, what happens when an order is placed, who is responsible for each part of the operation, how communication flows are organised, where bottlenecks occur and what happens when a client reports an issue. This exercise led to important internal outcomes, including better clarity on roles and improved practical communication.

Building on this exercise, functions and role descriptions were formalised, first at team level and then for each individual worker. Several informal habits were also formalised during this period. For example, new agreements were established regarding the reception of clients and responsibilities were redistributed between the workshop and the project managers to improve workflow and reduce pressure during peak periods. Based on the results of the Quicksan assessment and the individual follow-up

conversations, the company adjusted the work schedules for some workers to better accommodate their personal circumstances.

Another important point concerned the code of conduct. The company felt it was important to introduce a code of conduct, review it together and have it signed by the entire team, as well as newly recruited members, to state shared values such as mutual respect, professionalism and zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour (from either colleagues or clients). This was an important step to work more closely on interpersonal relationships and internal communication. The draft code of conduct developed as part of the PrePS in Wood project was a helpful tool and the support from Woodwize in this regard was once again appreciated.

Since these steps were taken during the pilot phase of the project, some materials were not yet available in their final form. However, this did not pose a significant issue from the company's perspective. In the interviews, it was mentioned that the tools were easy to apply and adapt to the company's specific questions.

6.3 Actors involved

As indicated above, several actors were involved in implementing the project within the company: Woodwize staff, the company owner, the person responsible for HR and prevention matters, and all company workers (in both the office and the workshop) were directly involved in the project. In addition, trade union representatives mentioned that they also closely followed up on the pilot projects through the joint committee and as members of the focus group. Once the project ended, follow-up was primarily the responsibility of the owner and the person responsible for HR and prevention.

The collaboration among all actors went very smoothly. One interviewee also praised the role of Woodwize in project implementation and was very positive about the support the company received.

6.4 Results and outcomes at company level

The company was very positive about its involvement in the PrePS in Wood project and the toolkit that was developed. Both the process and the project output were assessed favourably.

Regarding the process, the company appreciated the gradual, stepwise approach, combined with the excellent support provided by the Woodwize team. Interactions with other stakeholders were also deemed to be positive.

Concerning the outcome, being involved in PrePS in Wood has triggered real change in the company. More specifically, as explained in the interviews, the company's participation in PrePS in Wood has led to an increased focus on psychosocial risks and well-being, a stronger culture of openness, better-defined roles and an improved understanding of work processes, more respectful interpersonal relationships and improved internal communication. The project proved that even small, low-cost changes such as 'quick wins' can have a significant impact when carried out in a structured and supportive way.

In the future, the company plans to continue using the toolkit, for example by regularly repeating the Quickscore process to assess its progress and identify any emerging issues. In addition, several other tools have already been incorporated into the company's processes. For instance, the code of conduct is introduced to each new staff member as part of the onboarding process. Beyond these actions, the company already had a practice of conducting regular informal staff check-ins, but PrePS in Wood highlighted just how important such check-ins are, so these have now become a more structured part of the overall approach towards well-being within the organisation. In this context, although psychosocial risks had not previously been included in the company's overall training schedule, the company is now more mindful of this aspect and makes reference to psychosocial risks and well-being when addressing other topics, if relevant – for example, if a safety toolbox is being discussed and one of the issues relates to high work pressure or tight deadlines, there is also some reflection on the potential psychosocial risks associated with this.

6.5 Success factors and barriers at company level

Success factors

Several key factors contributed to the successful implementation of PrePS in Wood at company level. First of all, the toolkit itself was widely praised for being practical, clearly structured and easy to use, which made it user friendly, even for companies with limited time or resources. Tools such as Quickscan and conversation cards offered an accessible and unthreatening way of introducing psychosocial well-being topics into the workplace. This was important for the company, given that well-being is one of its core values, but this topic had previously received less attention in training and prevention plans than other OSH topics.

Second, the company welcomed the fact that the solutions offered were practical and often easy and relatively cheap to implement. At the same time, the toolkit triggered further reflection and conversations about psychosocial risks and well-being, which have already resulted in a culture shift according to interviewees.

The step-by-step guidance and hands-on support from Woodwise also played a crucial role in building trust and ensuring the process was followed through.

Barriers

Although few barriers were reported by the company based on its own experiences, it noted that some changes, take time, such as cultural shifts. In addition, in smaller enterprises, where resources are stretched and roles overlap, maintaining momentum around psychosocial risks and well-being topics can be difficult. At the company under review, this was addressed by the person responsible for HR and prevention, who remains engaged with these topics and is striving to keep them on the agenda. In addition, the tools are now embedded within the company's processes, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will go unused.

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