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| Negotiating return to work in the age of demographic change through industrial relations (VS/2019/0075) | File:Flag of Belgium (civil).svg - Wikimedia Commons |
| **Belgium** |
| **General indicators for work incapacity, industrial relations and chronic disease\***  |
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| ***Public spending on incapacity (% of GDP)*** | ***Collective bargaining coverage (%)*** | ***Chronic morbidity (people having longstanding illness or health problems)[[1]](#footnote-1)*** |
| **Policy framework and key issues for return to work** |
| * Act of 4 August 1996 on Wellbeing at Work (Chapter 4)
* Law of 3 July 1978 on Employment Contracts
* Compulsory Healthcare and Indemnity Insurance Legislation of 14 July 1994
* Anti-discrimination Legislation
 | * Lack of coordination between health professionals
* High incidence of contract termination due to medical reasons and lack of support for employees declared permanently unfit to return to the same company
* Insufficient support for SMEs to implement reasonable accommodations
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| ***Policy framework*** | ***Key policy issues*** |
| **Involvement of social partners in return to work policies** |
| * Strong culture of social dialogue, high unionisation rate and collective bargaining coverage, media presence
* Involvement in legislation via the National Labour Council and the High Council for Prevention and Protection at Work
 | * Responsibility of health and safety committee to create an internal company reintegration policy
* Obligation for the employer to draft individual reintegration plans
* Possibility for union delegates to help the employee during negotiations with the employer and colleagues
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| ***National level*** | ***Company level*** |
| **Policy recommendations**  |
| **Recommendations for policymakers*** Address the initial design flaws of the legislation on reintegration procedures
* Collect reliable and systematic data on return to work
* Foster tailored vocational rehabilitation programmes
* Audit companies with high incidence of incapacity
 | **Recommendations for social partners*** Include return to work in a cross-sectoral collective agreement on wellbeing at work
* Draft joint cross-sectoral or sectoral guidelines on the design of a company-level reintegration policy
* Continue raising awareness by training affiliates
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| **Further information** |
| **References**Lopez Uroz, N., L. Westhoff and M. Akgüç (2020), Working paper on national-level and company-level industrial relations actors’ involvement in facilitating return to work policies and identifying best practices – Country Report for Belgium, Brussels.Mutualités Libres (2019), Reprendre le travail pendant une période d’incapacité, Brussels.\*Sources: Data on public spending on incapacity and collective bargaining coverage is taken from the OECD. Chronic morbidity is taken from Eurostat. |

1. The concept is operationalised by a question asking if the respondent suffers from any longstanding (of a duration of at least six months) illness or health problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)