

# Psychosocial Wellbeing at Work

Feel good at work!

# Introduction

This brochure is intended as a guide for employees who are experiencing psychological and/or physical symptoms due to their work situation.

You will start by analysing your psychosocial wellbeing.  
Then, we will go over the steps you can take to resolve these symptoms.

Discussing your problems with someone else can be an important first step. This could be your partner, a close colleague or your manager. An HR staff member or trade union representative can also be good to talk to.

If your problems persist or you just want a no-obligation confidential meeting, you can go to your organisation's confidential counsellor (CC) or prevention advisor on psychosocial aspects (PAPS). They can not only lend an ear, but can also mediate and propose solutions.

This brochure explains the various procedures, ensuring that you have all the information you need to make an informed decision.



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# 1

## Analysing your psychosocial wellbeing

Psychosocial risk is legally defined as the chance that one or more employees will suffer psychological or physical harm through exposure to factors related to:

- Work organisation
- Job content
- Working conditions
- Living conditions at work
- Interpersonal relationships

If you complete the checklist on the opposite page, this will give an overview of your symptoms and any work-related factors.

### Part 1: Inventory

Mark any signs you are currently experiencing (left-hand column).

Is a specific complaint work-related? Draw one or more arrows to factors that are causing or contributing to your symptoms (right-hand column). Also reflect on any private circumstances that could negatively affect your views regarding your work situation.

### Part 2: Evaluation

Did you draw any arrows during the previous exercise? If so, in the diagram below, mark the extent of the impact of your complaints on yourself, your team and your organisation.

<b>Yourself</b>	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Your team</b>	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Your organisation</b>	Low	Moderate	High

In case of a moderate to high impact on yourself, your team and/or organisation, you could or should consider addressing this. After all, problems at work can also extend beyond the work itself, impacting your private life, or vice versa.

## Signs of unwellness

<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability
<input type="checkbox"/> Apathy
<input type="checkbox"/> Demotivation
<input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia
<input type="checkbox"/> Anger
<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety
<input type="checkbox"/> Depression
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnout
<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle pain
<input type="checkbox"/> Shaking
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweating
<input type="checkbox"/> Headache
<input type="checkbox"/> Ulcer
<input type="checkbox"/> Accidents
<input type="checkbox"/> Hyperventilating
<input type="checkbox"/> Aggression
<input type="checkbox"/> Absent-mindedness
<input type="checkbox"/> Worrying
<input type="checkbox"/> Indecisiveness
<input type="checkbox"/> Incapacity for work
<input type="checkbox"/> Bullying
<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual harassment
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal issues
<input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination/racism

## Work-related factors

Organisational structure
Organisational changes
How tasks are divided
Work procedures
Work tools
Management style
Human resources policy
My task complexity
Emotional burden
Lack of role clarity
Too much or too little work
Physically demanding work
Type of work schedule
Nature of my contract
Few training opportunities
Few advancement opportunities
Follow-up on my performance
Set-up and working tools
Noise, lighting, ventilation
Relationship with my colleagues
Relationship with my manager
Relationship with third parties such as customers
Contact options
Communication within the organisation
Other: ...



# 2

## First steps towards taking action

You have now reflected on various factors that may affect your wellbeing at work. Depending on your symptoms and work-related factors, you can take action in different ways.

We will outline a framework to help you take some first steps without getting too caught up in an ultimate solution. There may not always be one immediately available.

### 2.1. What have you done so far?

**Please fill in as applicable:**

What have you done so far? .....

.....

Who have you talked to about your problems? .....

.....

What were the effects? .....

.....

What was helpful? What was not? .....

.....

The most obvious people to ask for help are those closest to you. You could try discussing the matter with your partner, a friend, family member or trusted colleague. They can offer you advice and boost your courage and confidence until you feel able to talk to the person in question. Such conversations can provide relief and support.

You could also approach your manager, employer or someone else within your organisation. Within the organisation, they are mandated to take action with you, to improve your situation and/or resolve your problem.



## Tip

Your manager will generally be your first point of contact. However, if they are actually part of the problem, there are other people in your organisation you can go to for help. You can also take action by approaching your internal prevention advisor (IPA), a confidential counsellor (CC) or prevention advisor on psychosocial aspects (PAPS). Your employee handbook or your internal coordinating prevention advisor have information on how to contact them.

## 2.2. What is holding you back from taking further steps?

It is important to identify what or who is preventing you from taking a certain course of action. You have the best knowledge of your specific circumstances, after all. Don't hesitate to discuss such barriers with someone you trust.

Possible barriers	Note your own barriers here
I do not want to burden my colleagues with this.	
Doing something will just make things worse.	
I am afraid of losing my job.	
There is nothing to be done about it anyway.	
I've already talked about this so much.	
I'm embarrassed that this has happened to me.	

## 2.3. What points of contact are available within and outside your organisation?

When you are in the proverbial 'eye of the storm', it can be hard to identify your allies or people who could be of help.

The next page suggests people you can contact. There are many partners available to you both inside and outside your organisation. IDEWE is an independent, external occupational prevention and protection service.

That means we can act to connect and mediate between the various parties or help to establish an appropriate action plan.

You can contact IDEWE in instances of bullying and violence of a discriminatory nature or sexual harassment at work. For discrimination unrelated to working relationships, you can also contact Unia, the IGVM (Institute for Equality between Women and Men) or the VMRI (Flemish Human Rights Institute).

## Within your organisation

Management  
Department head  
Internal prevention advisor  
Union  
Confidential counsellor  
(Non-)direct manager  
Colleague  
Coordinator  
Social services

## Outside your organisation

Unia  
IGVM  
General practitioner  
Therapist  
(Career) coach  
Specialist  
CAW or CGG  
VMRI

### Your service for prevention & protection at work

can connect both sides or act independently

Coordinating prevention advisor  
Occupational doctor  
Prevention advisor on psychosocial aspects



## 2.4. Your action plan

You have now created a list of your contributing factors, noted what steps you have taken so far and the most important barriers that prevent you from taking further action.

Now it's time to take the next step and write down what you could do to address your problems yourself and whose help you might enlist. Perhaps you can ask your manager or union representative for a risk assessment of your specific work situation to help address the problem. Be aware that your employer may also decide to have a PAPS carry out an intervention without the requirement for a request (such as a team assessment). To explore this option, you can go to the IPA, confidential counsellor, HR or your trade union.

	Problem description	What can I do of my own accord?	Who to involve?
1			
2			
3			

## 2.5. Follow-up and evaluation of actions

Finally, note the actions you have taken, what has been agreed and whether or not this resolves the problem.

	Action	Established agreements following contact with...	Evaluation
1			
2			
3			

If these steps do not lead to the outcome you want, you can start a special psychosocial risk procedure.

# 3

## Special procedures for psychosocial risks

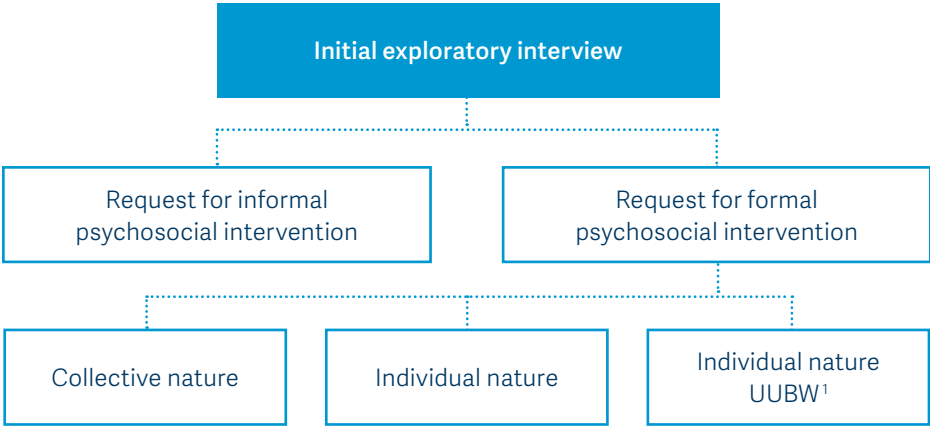
### 3.1. What can a confidential counsellor or PAPS do for you?

Before we explain the various procedures, we would like to clarify what a confidential counsellor or prevention adviser on psychosocial aspects (PAPS) can do for you. What can and can't you expect from these people?

What can you expect?	What not to do?
Support and substantiated advice following a confidential meeting	Extended counselling: this is provided by a therapist or coach
<p>At your request, if your employer agrees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple supportive meetings</li> <li>• Facilitating discussion of your psychosocial risks with someone in the organisation</li> <li>• Intervention as a mediator</li> </ul>	<p>A confidential counsellor or PAPS does not perform crisis management. You can generally arrange an initial exploratory interview with a confidential counsellor or PAPS within ten calendar days.</p>
A confidential counsellor or PAPS acts as a guide to help you see which paths you can take. You remain ultimately responsible for deciding which path to take.	A confidential counsellor or PAPS cannot negotiate your working conditions. That is what your trade union is for.

### 3.2. Initial exploratory interview

You can refer to the preparations in the previous pages during your meeting with the confidential counsellor or PAPS. After this interview, you will have a better understanding of your needs and be able to make an informed choice between the various options.



Together with the confidential counsellor or PAPS, you can go over the various options and then decide whether to first take action yourself or to go straight to one of the procedures below.



1 Undesirable Unacceptable Behaviour at Work (UUBW)

### 3.3. Request for informal psychosocial intervention

With an informal intervention, the focus is on coming to a confidential, discreet solution. What are the options in the context of an informal psychosocial intervention?

- ☐ You just want a listening ear and some advice. This may involve one or several meetings with a confidential counsellor or PAPS.
- ☐ You ask the PAPS or confidential counsellor to contact someone else in the organization who could help resolve the problem.
- ☐ You ask the PAPS or confidential counsellor to initiate a reconciliation process.

In order to be able to make a good decision, you start by meeting with the confidential counsellor or PAPS for an exploratory interview. Be sure to discuss what the three options could involve in your specific situation with your confidential counsellor or PAPS. For example, in the event of undesirable behaviour at work, stress or conflicts, the confidential counsellor or PAPS might enter into discussions with the other party with the aim of stopping the undesirable behaviour, reducing stress or improving your interactions.

#### Example

Rita has been working at a municipality for ten years. She has been a committed employee for many years, but has been suffering from various tension complaints recently. She is afraid she'll burn out due to the constant stress. First she missed out on a position and now a new manager is assigning her completely different tasks from before. Other colleagues have all kinds of other expectations of Rita that she can no longer meet. Following a confidential meeting with Viviane, the confidential counsellor, it is agreed that Viviane will inform Rita's manager of the burdens Rita is experiencing and that they will then sit down to work out a solution together.

## Tip

It's worth exploring this informal route first. You can then deal with your problem more discreetly, faster and in a more solution-oriented way. An informal request is aimed at improving wellbeing together and in dialogue with each other.

If this approach doesn't produce the necessary improvement, you can always request formal psychosocial intervention after all. You could also consider whether to request a risk assessment of the specific work situation through your manager or trade union representative to address the problem.

### 3.4. Request for formal psychosocial intervention

Essentially, a request for formal psychosocial intervention involves asking your employer to remedy a psychosocial risk. The employer will be informed of the existence of (collective or individual) psychosocial unwellness within their organisation in writing by the PAPS and asked to implement appropriate measures.

Following a request for formal intervention for an individual problem, the PAPS first analyses the situation and writes an advisory report with suggestions for improvement. Following a request for formal intervention for a group problem, an employer may opt to first implement measures themselves or (arrange to) carry out a risk assessment of their own. Finally, the employer decides what to do with the advice, after which you receive the necessary feedback via your employer and the PAPS.

A formal intervention may still include solution-oriented consultation and an attempt at conciliation. Things will simply take place within a more formal context, with fixed deadlines for follow-up.

What are the options in the context of a formal psychosocial intervention? Specify your choice below following a compulsory interview with the PAPS.

- ☐ I request a formal psychosocial intervention of a primarily collective nature.
- ☐ I request a formal psychosocial intervention of a primarily individual nature.
- ☐ I request a formal psychosocial intervention of a primarily individual nature in relation to harassment and inappropriate behaviour such as bullying, violence and sexual harassment at work.

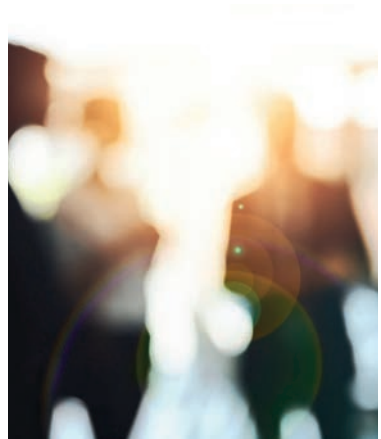
## Tip

Even at this stage, you still have a say in the extent to which your problematic work situation is open to discussion. However, you will have far less control than in the event of an informal procedure.

A PAPS may reject your formal request if the situation you describe very clearly does not involve any psychosocial risks at work or does not constitute harassment and inappropriate behaviour as defined in the legislation. Good preparation can make this process easier.

### 3.4.1. When should you submit a request for collective formal psychosocial intervention?

- If you have already gone through an informal procedure.
- If the risks you describe could also lead to reduced wellbeing for other colleagues.
- If you prefer to remain anonymous. The collective nature makes it possible to conceal your identity from your employer.
- If you have no problem with your employer discussing the situation with your trade union representative or the Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work.



#### Please note:

Anonymity is relative. Employers that know their workplace and people sometimes know who is raising which alarm.

#### Example

Bert discusses his stress complaints with the PAPS. He works with six colleagues in a very small space and tensions can flare on occasion. The room has little natural light and the volume of work is so great that they rarely get a chance to help each other. Bert notes that his entire team is suffering. Until now, addressing the problem by other means has not yielded a solution.

### 3.4.2. When should you submit a request for individual formal psychosocial intervention?

- If you have already gone through an informal procedure.
- If you have already submitted a request for a collective formal psychosocial intervention but your personal situation has not improved.
- If the risks you describe apply mainly to you personally.
- If you are prepared to disclose your identity to your employer.
- If you don't mind the PAPS talking to various other employees based on your account, as they consider this useful for the further analysis of your situation and to be able to provide your employer with appropriate advice.
- If you have no problem with the PAPS also passing on general recommendations to the internal coordinating prevention adviser.

#### Tip

In very urgent and extreme situations, the PAPS may propose protective measures to the employer to keep things tenable for you and the other involved parties during the assessment.

#### Please note:

If the work situation was already assessed in the context of an informal intervention, you might want to ask yourself how much more a formal intervention will achieve.

## Example

Let's return to Rita's example. After her meeting with the confidential counsellor and over the course of several discussions during which confidential counsellor Viviane provided support, Rita's manager comes to various agreements with her to improve her situation. However, even after six months Rita is not seeing any follow-up or improvement.



### 3.4.3. When should you submit a request for individual formal psychosocial intervention due to undesirable and unacceptable behaviour at work?

- If you have already gone through an informal procedure.
- If you already submitted a formal request previously and your personal situation did not improve or the employer refused your request.
- If the risks you describe mainly affect you personally and clearly relate to bullying and violence, whether or not of a discriminatory nature, or to sexual harassment at work.
- If you are prepared to disclose your identity to your employer.
- If you have no problem with the PAPS discussing this with various relevant employees and witnesses. This is necessary for the further analysis of your situation and to provide the employer with the necessary advice.
- If you have no problem with the PAPS also passing on their advice to the internal coordinating prevention adviser.

## Tip

This scenario offers you protection against adverse measures for a certain period of time. There must be a way to whistle-blow without being penalised for it, after all.

Note: If you abuse the procedure, this protection does not apply. For example, you may not submit a formal request to prevent your dismissal or to damage someone else's reputation.

## Example

John returns to the PAPS a year after his request for a collective formal psychosocial intervention. He says his employer has provided additional office space so that he and his six colleagues can work in peace.

Despite the positive organisational improvements, tensions relating to his colleague David are mounting. As of a few months, David shouts at John regularly, checks his work without cause and gossips about the quality of John's work. John also failed to be invited to two meetings his other colleagues were at. John has talked to David, his supervisor and the confidential counsellor, but the situation continues to escalate.



# 4

## What if the special procedures do not result in a solution?

If none of the special procedures above lead to a solution, you can still call upon the Inspectorate for Supervision of Wellbeing at Work or start legal proceedings via the industrial tribunal.

You can also decide to skip the special procedures, but to start with you will generally still be referred back to IDEWE, your external service for prevention and wellbeing at work.

The Inspectorate will check whether the employer has applied the internal procedure correctly and whether they have taken appropriate measures. If necessary, the Inspectorate may impose measures on the employer, taking into account the PAPS's advice.

The tribunal can also request the PAPS's advice and take this into account in the ruling.

# Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

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