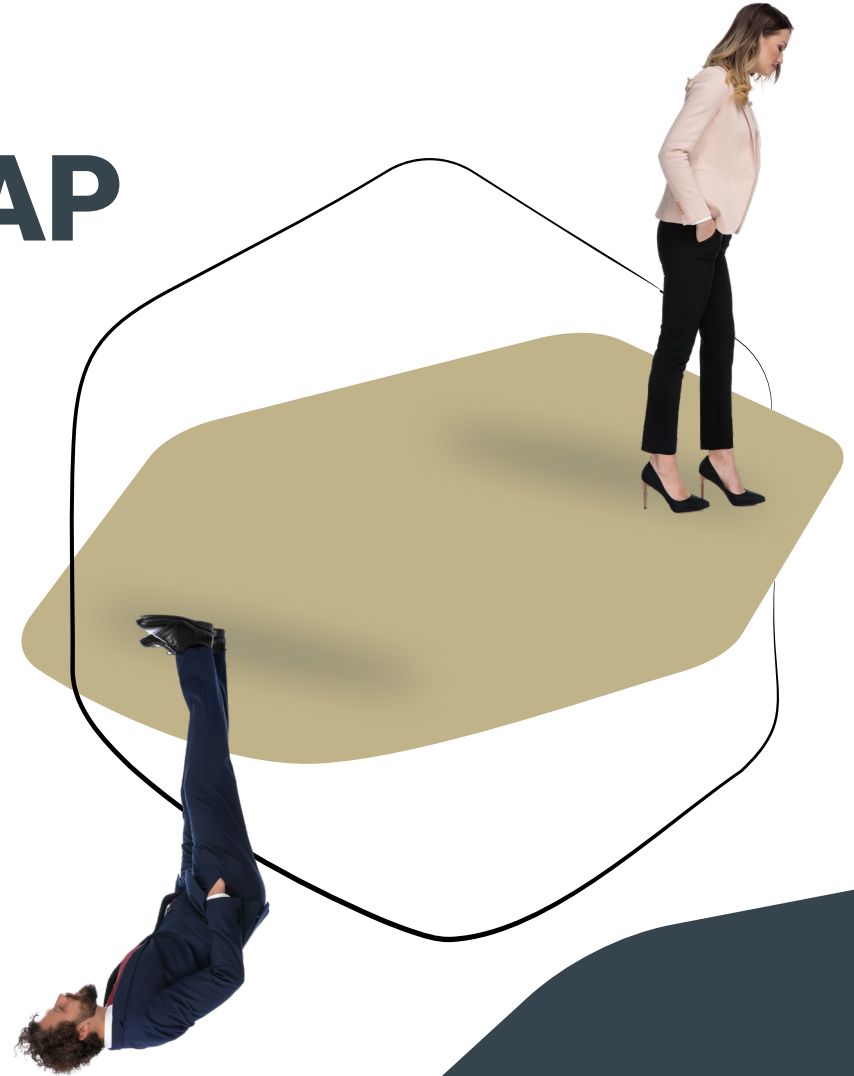


TALENT TRENDS 2024 · BELGIUM

THE EXPECTATION GAP

What OUR exclusive survey insights mean for
YOUR hiring and retention strategies in 2024





Contents

Introduction from our CEO, Nicholas Kirk

Who took our survey?

How the Expectation Gap is apparent across....

Salaries: Demands are rising as wage growth falls



Flexibility: Why work-life balance is a must have



DE&I: The difference between intention and impact



AI: Keeping pace when careers are changing



Conclusion: How to bridge the Expectation Gap

About PageGroup

Disclaimer

The percentages in this data might not add up to exactly 100%.
This is because we round numbers to make them simpler to understand.

An Expectation Gap has opened up in the workplace. How can we bridge the divide?

Last year, our flagship Talent Trends survey shed light on a significant shift within the world of work, which we termed 'The Invisible Revolution'. Coming out of the pandemic, a convergence of factors had resulted in a subtle but transformative change in workplace dynamics, with people thinking more holistically about the value their job contributes to their lives.

Now, just 12 months on, the situation has evolved again, with significant implications if you are hiring or retaining talent. Finding people strategies that work for all sides is becoming trickier - something we call 'The Expectation Gap'.

On the one hand, workers have a growing list of expectations, stretching far beyond competitive salaries and flexibility. On the other, their employers are facing significant pressures in a rapidly evolving business environment, making it harder for both sides to meet in the middle.

To delve deeper into this, we spoke to 50,000 workers worldwide for our 2024 Talent Trends survey, uncovering how people are really feeling and the critical insights employers need to know.

Here are some of the key findings:

- Whilst wage growth is slowing globally due to economic pressures employers are facing, **workers still expect higher salaries** to keep pace with the rising cost of living and feel valued for their contributions
- **Flexibility has become a flashpoint**, as employers grapple with implementing hybrid working models and policies that meet both business needs and employee preferences
- With five generations now in the workforce, **maintaining a dynamic and inclusive culture** where everyone can be their authentic selves is more complex than ever
- **Generative AI is no longer a concept rooted in the future.** It's already affecting people's daily working lives and career decisions, and adding another layer of complexity to the talent market

'The Expectation Gap' permeates all facets of the modern workplace, emphasising the importance of aligning expectations to foster a productive and truly cohesive work environment.

In the following pages, you'll discover insights and recommendations to bridge the gap, cultivate inclusive cultures, and confidently navigate the evolving work landscape.

Leveraging our strength as a global recruitment company and drawing on our proprietary data and technology, we provide valuable expertise, market knowledge, and insights to our customers, serving as a trusted partner.

With a presence in 37 markets worldwide, our team of specialist consultants stands ready to assist you navigate the complexities of the modern workforce. They can be reached via phone call, video call, or email, or you can [click here](#) to request a call back.

I hope you enjoy the report.



Nicholas Kirk
CEO at PageGroup

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Kirk'.

Mind the Gap

Key expectations uncovered in our Talent Trends survey



16,000
survey participants
in Europe

1. Flexibility is a must-have

Belgian workers highly prioritise flexibility, which encompasses hybrid work practices and the autonomy to shape their own work schedules.

2. Employees and job seekers want inclusive workplace

Belgian companies must continue to focus on building an inclusive culture where everyone can thrive.

3. AI is here, and workers are braced for the impact

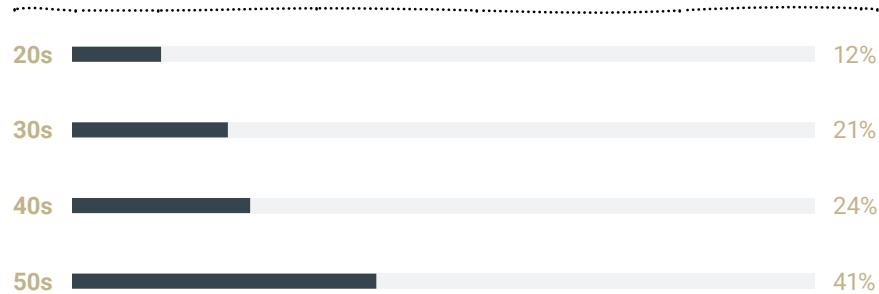
Half of Belgian workers believe AI will shape the rest of their careers.

549
survey participants
in Belgium

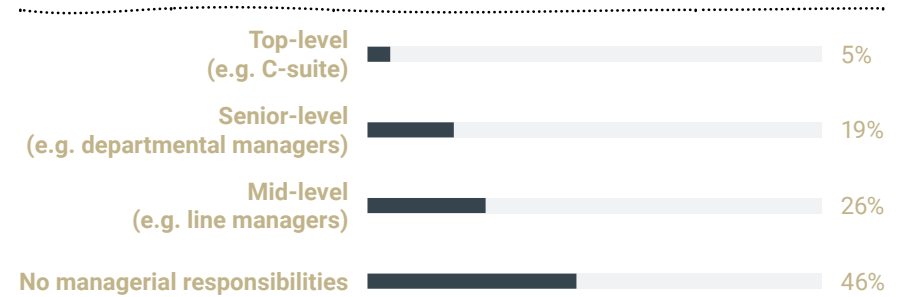
Talent Trends is the most robust and comprehensive workplace survey of its kind in the world today

Who took our survey?

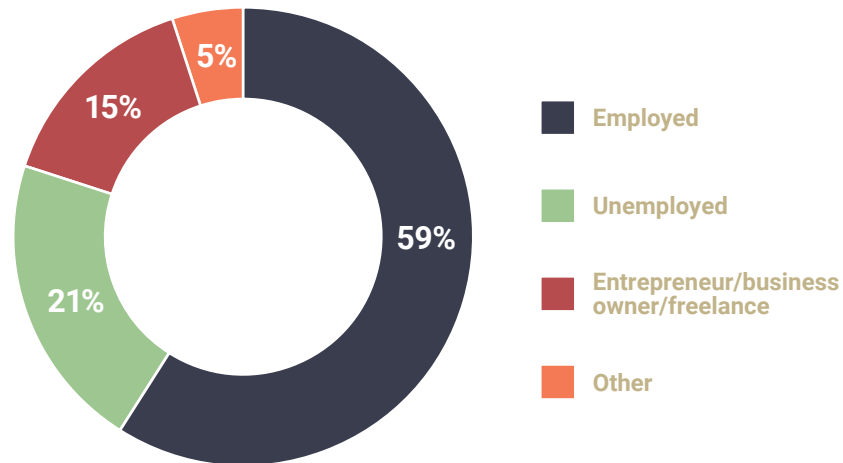
AGE



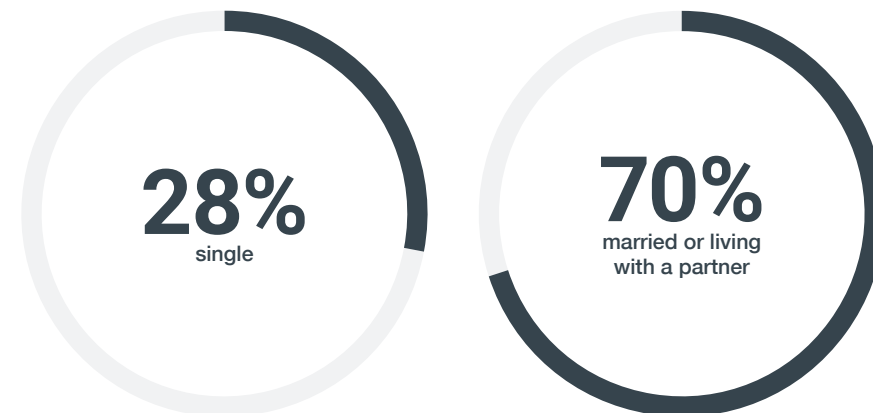
MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES



EMPLOYMENT STATUS



RELATIONSHIP AND FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS





The Expectation Gap on... SALARY

Demands are rising
as wage growth slows



Salary is (still) king

But are demands for higher wages rooted in reality?

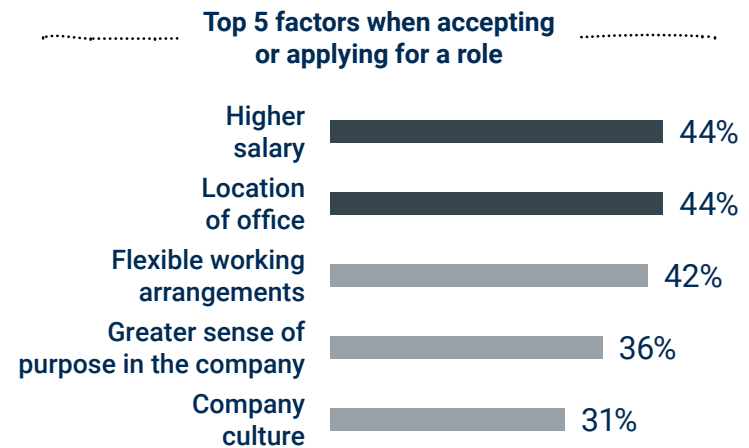
Are Belgian employees among the happiest in Europe?

At first glance, it might seem so. Job satisfaction here is higher than the European average, with 2 in 5 employees actively seeking new roles. Likewise, Belgium has lower levels of salary dissatisfaction than most of its neighbours.

If we dig deeper into the data, however, a more complex picture emerges. The percentage of workers unhappy with their pay has grown since our Talent Trends 2023 report – a warning sign for employers, who might need to rethink their salary strategies to match employee expectations.

Despite this rising unhappiness with pay, only about one-third of Belgian workers have tried to negotiate a raise recently. More worryingly, a quarter of Belgian employees have never received a pay increase, compared to just 1 in 5 across Europe. This suggests that Belgian employers might be slower than their European neighbours to acknowledge and reward their workers' contributions. If this isn't addressed, it could create a surge of dissatisfaction and employees leaving, as those who feel undervalued look for better opportunities.

For Belgian employers, the message is clear: salary remains a vital tool for attracting and retaining top talent. Around half of surveyed companies agree it's the biggest factor in a candidate's decision, and a third see it as vital for employee retention, even if it ranks just below work-life balance and recognition. However, when discussing methods for retaining talent, it's clear that salary is not the main factor for businesses within the EU. To retain talent, factors such as recognition and work-life balance rank even higher than salaries.





SALARY GUIDE

What should you *really* be paying?

Check out our Salary Guide for the latest information across key sectors and industries in your market.

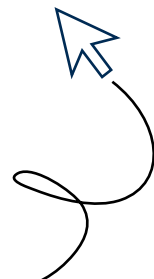
Are you a professional looking for a new opportunity or just want to know if it's time to (re)negotiate your salary?

Are you a business or HR professional experiencing difficulties attracting or retaining talent?

Hard-to-find profiles, sectors that pay the most, in-demand skills, new candidate expectations... our recruitment experts have thoroughly analysed more than 10 sectors and more than 150 professions to find the answer.

Belgium is the sole country implementing a legal index. Delve deeper into this topic in our Salary Guide.

[CLICK HERE](#)





The Expectation Gap on... FLEXIBILITY

Why work-life balance is a must have



Work-life balance and flexibility: understanding the nuances

Higher salaries get people through the door, but what matters changes once they're settled

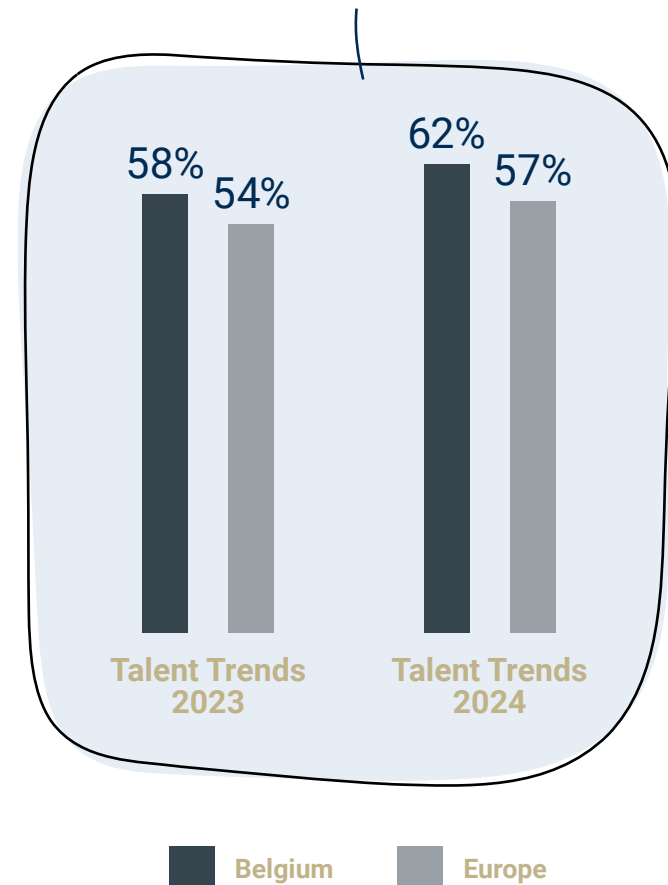
While salary is usually the biggest worry for Belgian job seekers, priorities change once they're settled into their new jobs. Work-life balance becomes the most important thing for job happiness – even more than salary.

Belgian job seekers highly value flexibility – 4 in 10 consider it essential when choosing a role. However, they don't see flexibility as the same thing as work-life balance. Instead, employees want a healthy overall balance and see flexibility as one tool to achieve it. Furthermore, 3 out of 5 Belgian workers would turn down a promotion to protect their wellbeing – slightly above the European average.

For Belgian employers, this means it's time to focus on offering true work-life balance. Flexible options like hybrid work (which 63% of Belgians already have) and adjustable hours are essential, but it's bigger than that. Companies need to create a culture where people's time is respected, taking breaks is encouraged, and overall wellbeing is a priority.

Companies that understand the difference between simple flexibility and a genuine work-life balance will be where employees feel they can do great work and still have a life outside the office. This leads to happier, more loyal employees and a stronger company overall.

Proportion of Belgian employees who prioritise wellbeing over a promotion



Flexibility: A Make-or-Break Factor for Belgian Workers

As flexibility becomes a top priority, employers must keep pace to attract and retain talent

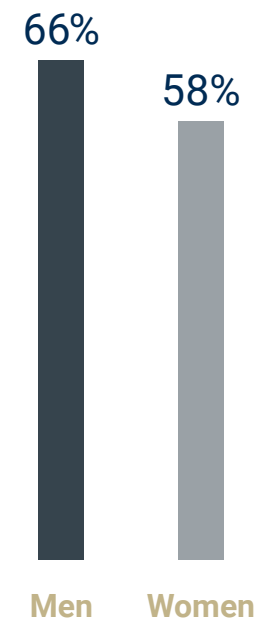
You might expect senior-level employees to be most likely to want hybrid and work-from-home flexibility. But in Belgium, that's not the case. Workers who have been in their roles for less than five years are even more eager for this option. This finding, along with the fact that over 7 in 10 Belgian workers overall desire flexibility, highlights a significant shift towards prioritising work-life balance across all levels of experience.

Flexibility is such a big deal that 4 in 10 job seekers rank it as essential when considering a new role. Employers who want to attract the best people must prioritise flexibility.

One way this is already happening is through hybrid work options. More than 6 in 10 Belgian employees have this setup, which mixes working from home with time at the office.

That's well above the European average, but plenty more work must be done. To build on this momentum, Belgian companies should set clear expectations by developing transparent policies around flexible hours, remote work arrangements and how to balance individual and team needs. It's also vital to train managers, equipping them with the skills to manage hybrid teams so that everyone feels seen and supported. Finally, organisations should celebrate flexibility by highlighting success stories and recognising employees who excel at using flexible work options to maximise their productivity and work-life balance.

Who is most likely to work in a hybrid arrangement?



The Office is Changing (Again!)

Belgian workers are heading back to the office but for different reasons than the rest of Europe

Belgium has embraced hybrid working, but over the last year, there's been a noticeable shift back towards the office. Over a third of those who work hybrid say they're spending more time there now than a year ago. Why is this happening, and how is it different from the rest of Europe?

In Belgium, having more face-to-face meetings (cited by 1 in 3 survey respondents) is the biggest reason people are returning. This suggests the change feels more natural, based on the job's needs and the value of seeing people in person. Across Europe, it's more often company policy changes and stricter rules that are pushing people back.

Colleagues matter too. Around a quarter of Belgians say they go to the office more because their colleagues are there. A similar proportion say they feel isolated when working from home too often. This data highlights how important the social side of work is and how much a sense of community matters.

To capitalise on these trends, companies should keep things flexible whenever possible, giving employees a voice in how and where they do their best work. Encouraging connection is also key. This might mean regular in-person get-togethers, fun virtual team events, or using collaboration tools that help people interact throughout the workday, even in a hybrid setup.

Work in the office more than 12 months ago



Work remotely more than 12 months ago



Work the same arrangement as 12 months ago



The 9-to-5 isn't the Only Way Anymore

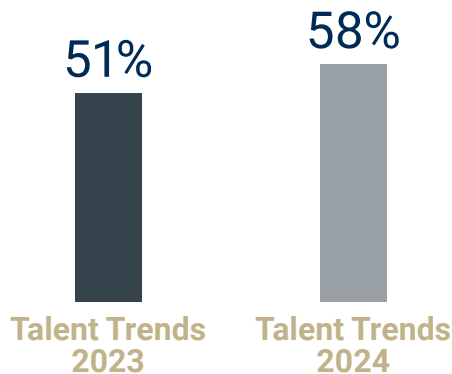
Belgian workers want more control over their careers, which means looking beyond traditional job setups

Flexibility isn't just about where you work; it's about how. More and more Belgians are interested in alternatives to the standard full-time job, offering more freedom and control.

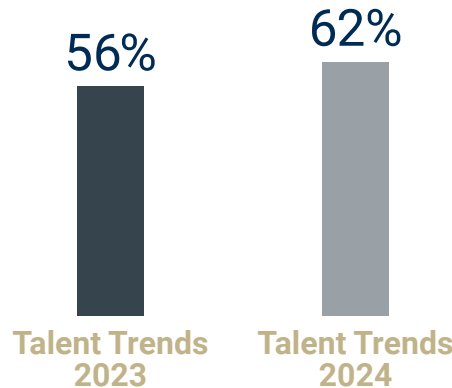
Temporary work through agencies is getting more popular, with almost 6 in 10 Belgian workers open to giving it a try. That compares to around half of those surveyed in Talent Trends 2023. Similarly, over half are willing to consider the freelancing/interim management route, a significant increase over last year. Men, the younger generation (particularly Generation Z) and those who haven't been in their current jobs very long are more likely to consider this kind of role. This shows Belgian workers' hunger to start something new and be their own boss. Does this imply that a new trend is emerging, especially among the younger generation?

Of course, some people still prefer the stability of a traditional job and its benefits. The key is for employers to offer a mix, supporting people in the work style that fits them best. This flexible approach makes for a diverse and resilient workforce.

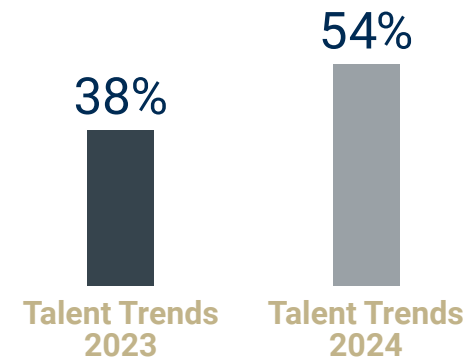
Would consider a temporary position through an employment agency



Would consider a fixed term contract



Would consider freelancing/interim management





TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

Flexibility

Flexibility is a top priority: For most Belgian workers, having control over their work hours and the option to work from home are the most important aspects of a flexible workplace.

Hybrid work is the norm: With 63% of Belgian employees enjoying a hybrid setup, companies that don't offer this risk falling behind in the talent race.

Face-to-face still matters: The return to the office in Belgium is primarily driven by the need for in-person meetings and collaboration. Strike a balance between remote work and face-to-face interaction.

Offer a variety of work arrangements: From temporary positions to freelancing/interim management, Belgian workers are seeking alternatives to the traditional 9-to-5. Provide a range of options to attract diverse talent.

Support individual choice: Recognise that different people thrive in different work arrangements. Foster a culture that supports employees in finding the right fit for their needs and aspirations.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I



AI





The Expectation Gap on... DE&I

The difference between intention
and impact



A Journey Towards Authentic Inclusion

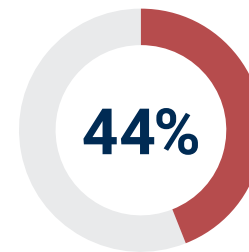
Never mind the buzzwords: bridging the gap between DE&I goals and reality

While Belgium stands ahead of much of Europe in crucial DE&I indicators – with a greater sense of inclusion and more professionals feeling they can be authentic at work – a clear majority still think there’s a way to go. Creating workplaces where everyone feels genuinely valued is an ongoing effort.

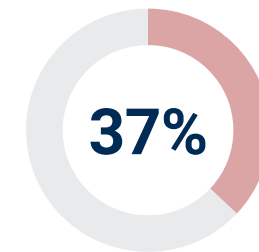
Though beneficial for flexibility, the pandemic-era shift to hybrid work models has made it harder for businesses across Belgium to foster a truly inclusive culture. As employees spend less time physically together, creating a sense of unity and understanding among diverse team members has become more challenging. On top of that, with an unprecedented five generations now sharing the workplace, the complexity of meeting everyone’s needs and expectations has never been higher.

To tackle these challenges, companies should put real effort into inclusion – this could mean planning events that celebrate diversity and help people understand different cultures. They should also make space (both online and in-person) for casual chats and team bonding, which helps build a sense of community even when everyone isn’t always in the office. Finally, it’s important to tailor how you communicate to make sure messages reach different generations effectively. Use a mix of tools (like email, video calls, and messaging apps), and maybe even offer training on how to communicate in a way that includes everyone.

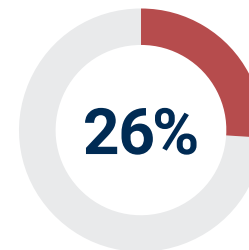
People who feel they can be their authentic selves at work



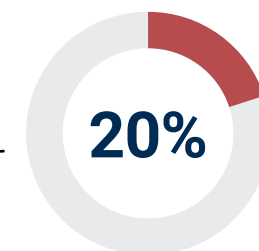
Belgium



Europe



believe their workplace is inclusive



Think their senior leadership team is diverse



Discrimination: An Ongoing Battle

Beyond the numbers: the personal impact of workplace bias

Sadly, discrimination continues to be a workplace problem in Belgium, just like in the rest of Europe. However, the types of discrimination people face here might differ slightly from the average. In Belgium, the biggest problem is age discrimination, followed closely by race-based discrimination. Gender discrimination is still a serious issue, but it's slightly less common here than in Europe overall.

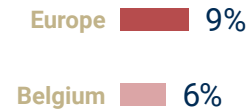
Even with the progress that's been made, it's essential to be honest about the remaining challenges. Half of Belgian workers think preventing age discrimination is essential, yet only a slightly higher number feel their employers are doing it well. There's a disconnect between what people want and what they're experiencing.

Belgian companies must go beyond simply preventing overt acts of discrimination. The subtle, everyday microaggressions – such as jokes about someone's age or dismissive comments towards women – can be just as damaging to an inclusive workplace culture. These behaviours, often rooted in unconscious bias, undermine efforts to create a truly equitable environment.

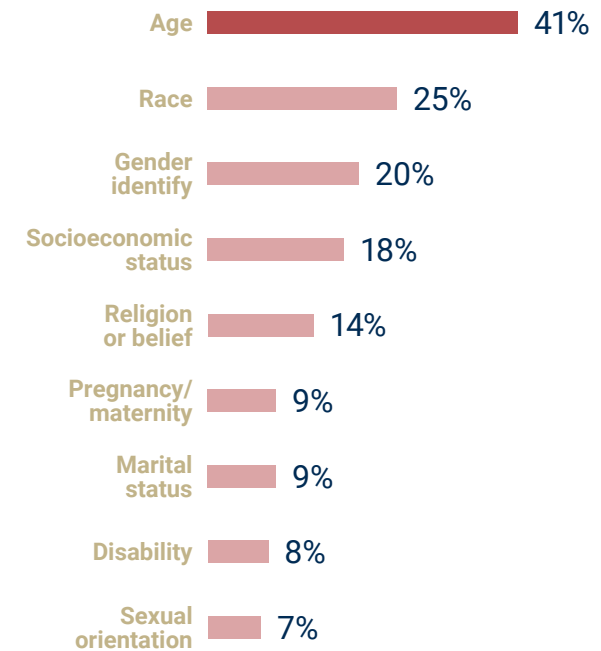
Women in Belgium face their own set of challenges. They're unhappier than men about efforts around issues like closing the pay gap or creating a more inclusive environment. This shows that companies need to do more than the basics regarding gender equality. They need to make sure women have real opportunities to move into leadership and are paid the same as men for the same work.

Some good news is that men and women are equally satisfied with efforts to get more women into leadership positions. However, Belgian employers must stay focused on building workplaces where everyone feels respected and has a real chance to succeed, regardless of age, race, gender or anything else.

% marginalised or discriminated against at work



Discrimination by type



The Reporting Gap

When silence speaks volumes

The reluctance to report discrimination is telling, with only 4 in 10 of those affected choosing to come forward. This hesitancy to speak up is a clear sign that companies need better support networks that make sure every voice is heard and valued.

Young workers, particularly in their 20s, and female employees are ready to challenge the status quo, suggesting a pathway for progress. Involving these voices in shaping DE&I strategies – from surveys and focus groups to mentorship programmes – can drive meaningful change and foster a culture of allyship and inclusivity.



Only **40%** of those experiencing discrimination choose to come forward

Salary
Flexibility
DE&I
AI



TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

DE&I

Bridge the gap between intentions and reality: While Belgian companies have made strides in DE&I, there's still a disconnect between goals and everyday experiences. Focus on translating good intentions into tangible, felt improvements for all employees.

Tackle age discrimination head-on: As the most prevalent form of discrimination in Belgian workplaces, age bias requires specific attention. Educate employees on the impact of ageism and create an environment where everyone's contributions are valued, regardless of their generation.

Empower women at all levels: While there's been progress in getting more women into leadership, Belgian companies must also focus on closing the gender pay gap and promoting greater equity and inclusion for women throughout the organisation.

Create a culture of psychological safety: With only 4 in 10 employees reporting discrimination, Belgian workplaces need to foster an environment where people feel safe to speak up. Encourage open dialogue, provide robust reporting mechanisms and take swift action to address issues.

Adapt DE&I strategies for the hybrid era: With hybrid working now the norm, Belgian companies must find new ways to build inclusive cultures across dispersed teams. That may involve more intentional virtual interactions, inclusive digital communication norms and remote mentorship programmes.

Measure, learn and improve: Regularly assess the impact of your DE&I efforts through employee surveys and focus groups. Use these insights to refine your approach and ensure you make meaningful progress towards a truly inclusive workplace.





The Expectation Gap on... AI

Keeping pace when careers are changing

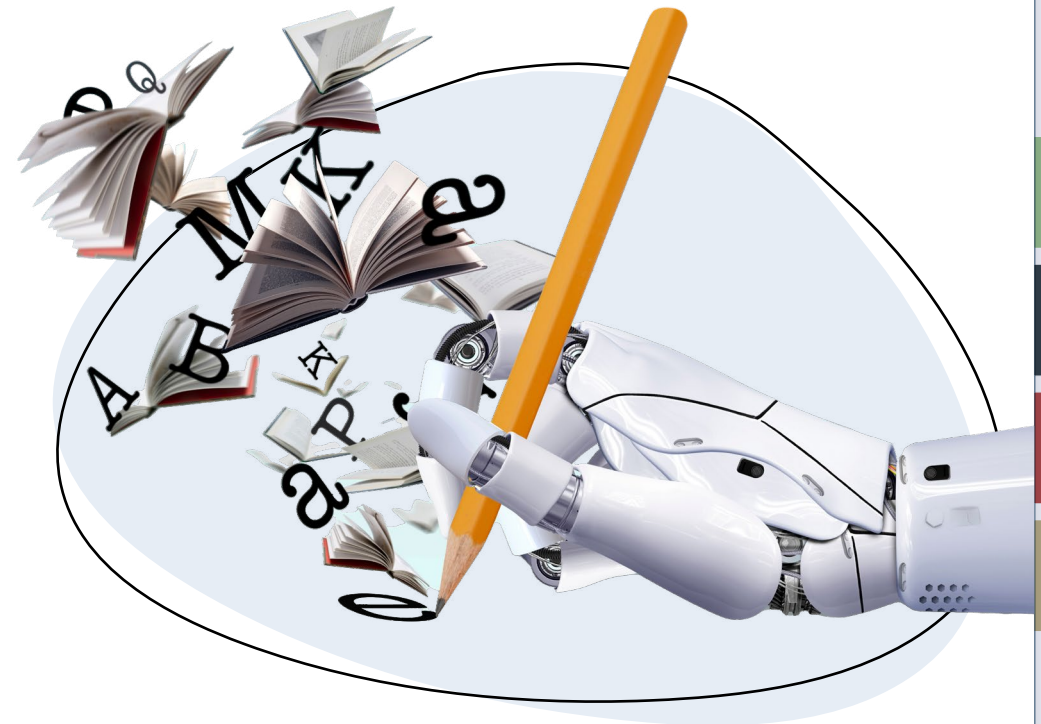




Artificial Intelligence in the Workplace: The Future is Now

Young employees in Belgium are embracing the new technology

The world of work is undergoing a seismic shift with the arrival of AI tools like ChatGPT, which are revolutionising how we do our jobs and reshaping career paths. This transformation empowers employees with powerful new tools and encourages companies to embrace these changes to boost productivity. At the same time, they need to navigate ethical and legal boundaries, such as protecting personal data and respecting intellectual property rights.



Salary



Flexibility



DE&I



AI



Belgium: One of Europe's Artificial Intelligence Pioneers

Setting the pace for the continent's AI revolution

Belgium is making significant strides in AI adoption, with over a quarter (27%) of professionals already using AI in their current roles. This puts Belgium slightly ahead of the European average (23%), demonstrating the country's readiness to embrace this transformative technology.

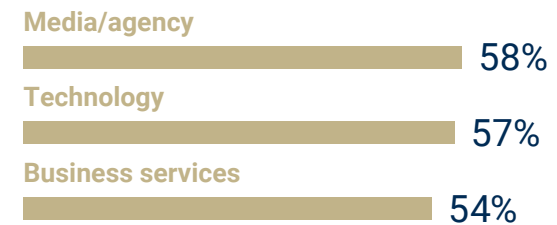
However, AI isn't the same for everyone in Belgium. Younger workers, especially those in their 20s, are likelier to use AI in their jobs. This reveals a generation gap in AI skills, and there's work to do to ensure everyone's ready for an AI-powered workplace.

AI also has people thinking differently about their careers. Younger professionals, especially those in their 20s and 30s, are most aware of its impact on the future of work. People who are more open to changing jobs also see how much AI has the potential to change their careers.

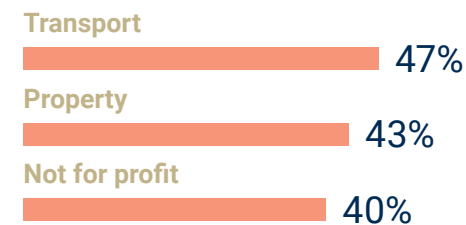
This is both a challenge and an opportunity for companies in Belgium. They need to bridge the AI gap between older and younger employees, as well as across different industries. This means investing in training, making it normal to always be learning and giving people real-world experience with AI.

On the other hand, the enthusiasm and readiness of younger professionals and those open to new roles present a unique opportunity. By harnessing this energy and providing targeted support, Belgian companies can cultivate a workforce that is not just prepared for the AI revolution but excited to be at the forefront of it.

Top 3 sectors for AI adoption in Europe



Bottom 3 sectors for AI adoption in Europe





TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

AI

Embrace the AI revolution: AI isn't coming; it's here. Help employees find AI tools they can use daily to do their jobs better and develop new ideas.

Bridge the generational AI divide: Address the gap in AI adoption between younger and older workers. Develop targeted training programmes that cater to the needs and learning styles of different age groups, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to upskill and stay relevant in the AI era.

Use the enthusiasm of early adopters: Identify and empower younger professionals and those open to new roles who are already engaged with AI. Involve them in piloting AI initiatives, gathering their feedback and using their success stories to get the rest of the company interested.

Address ethical and legal considerations: Develop clear guidelines and policies around the use of AI, addressing issues such as data privacy, intellectual property and potential biases.

Be ready for changing jobs: Recognise that AI is not just changing how we work, but also the very nature of jobs and careers. Regularly assess how AI impacts different roles and departments and help employees prepare for career changes.

Keep the human element at the centre: AI is an amazing tool, but it will never replace what makes humans special – creativity, caring and thinking outside the box. Help employees build these skills and their AI skills.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I



AI





CONCLUSION

How will you bridge the Expectation Gap?

The Expectation Gap we have explored in this report is visible across all elements of the modern workplace – from salaries to DE&I initiatives, AI strategies and hybrid policies. Bringing expectations back into alignment will be vital for employers as they create a new dynamic.

Our study suggests a solution: acknowledging the diversity in attitudes towards work and, therefore, approaching any issues with open communication and mutual respect.

Clearly stating expectations around issues such as workplace attendance, technology strategies and inclusion initiatives will reassure many employees, who may subsequently feel more engaged in ongoing conversations.

When hiring, you need to authentically build an image that fits with a potential employee's vision of their future. There's no one-size-fits-all solution – it's about nurturing trust between employees and employers so that open communication can take place and both sides can try to meet in the middle on their expectations.

Expectations might be out of alignment now. But we believe that more than ever, knowledge is power when finding solutions to these challenges and ultimately bridging the expectation gap to forge a future that works for all.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I



AI





CONCLUSION

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

The three-step process to realigning expectations and creating a modern workplace dynamic

1

Build trust - both ways**Create a culture of open communication and clear expectation setting**

Building trust isn't about delivering on every ask from workers and goes both ways - people have work to do to convince employers their version of flexibility and hybrid working is viable. It's important to communicate openly and honestly about decisions, even if they are not going to be universally popular.

2

Become change-resilient**Manage workplace anxieties and demonstrate a preparedness for future transitions**

It's fine to not have all the answers to conundrums around culture, flexibility and technology immediately – but acknowledging where approaches will need to evolve can build confidence and help people to prepare for what's coming next.

3

Always be people-first**Human capital is any organisation's greatest asset - and requires continuous investment**

As we've explored, there are more varied expectations for employers to navigate than ever. It's important to understand that there is no universal solution. It's about balancing individual needs – and recognising that it's impossible to deliver on all of them - with those of the collective workforce.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I



AI



PageInsights

Explore our data your way

What we've detailed in this report is a mere fraction of the insights from our Talent Trends 2024 survey. When it comes to finding the talent you need in this ever more competitive hiring landscape, we know that knowledge is power.

That's why we've also launched an **innovative interactive tool**, which puts all the information you need on what's driving the talent market right at your finger tips. You can explore our data your way - by choosing any two filters across countries, industries or job functions - and the tool is an easy point of reference to come back to as many times as you need.

[Give the tool a try](#)

About PageGroup

Are you hiring?

Based on your recruitment needs, we have four internationally recognised and respected brands (Page Executive, Michael Page, Page Personnel, and Page Outsourcing) ready to help you find the right talent for your business.

PageExecutive

Executive search

Page Executive – the executive search division of PageGroup – offers a fresh approach to search, selection and advisory solutions for leadership talent. Recognised for the expertise and global reach of our consultants, as well as our powerful in-house research function, our tailored services, speed of delivery and high success rates are why organisations worldwide choose Page Executive to secure their leaders of tomorrow.



MichaelPage

Qualified professionals

Michael Page provides specialised recruitment services for professionals at middle management to leadership levels, along with highly specialised technical positions.



PagePersonnel

Clerical professionals

Page Personnel specialises in recruitment services for quality professionals within the professional support space through to middle management.



PageOutsourcing

Flexible recruitment outsourcing

Page Outsourcing specialises in delivering high volume talent acquisition solutions for permanent and temporary workforces. With the ability to meet ongoing or outcome based hiring needs, Page Outsourcing's support covers recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), managed service programs (MSP) and talent acquisition advisory services.



Scan or click on the relevant QR code to get in touch with one of our consultants.

