New wave social legislation

Navigating Belgium’s labour law changes

July 2026

Belgium has introduced a series of important labour law developments as of mid 2026. These reforms aim to modernise the labour market, increase flexibility and address broader socio-economic challenges such as youth employment and wage competitiveness.

In this newsletter, we will inform you of four important developments of labour law that employers need to know about.

1. Major labor law reform enters into force

Belgium has implemented a significant modernisation of labour law through two Acts forming part of the federal government agreement 2025–2029.

Voluntary overtime

One of the key changes concerns the voluntary overtime. Before, two systems were used, the voluntary overtime hours (120 hours per year if used separately and 100 hours per year when combined with relance hours) and the relance hours (120 hours).

Now, with the Act of 18 May 2026 on changes concerning the voluntary overtime hours and the Social Penal Code, they have been harmonised into one single system allowing up to 360 hours annually, retroactively applicable from 1 April 2026. For a substantial portion of these hours (240 hours), no overtime premium is required, and no social security contributions and taxes are due, which significantly reduces labour costs in peak periods.

Simplification working time administration

The Act of 18 May 2026 on divers labour law stipulations introduced a simplification of the obligation to list all work schedules by allowing it to be replaced by a more flexible "framework of standard working hours". This allows employers to define general time boundaries without formalizing every individual schedule. This has entered into force as from 1 June 2026.

There is no obligation to adapt an already existing employment regulation.

The applicable legislation for part-time work schedules however remain unchanged, apart from the rule on the minimum threshold.

Reduced minimum threshold for part-time work

In the past, part-time employees were obliged to have a weekly working schedule of at least one-third of a full-time employees working schedule. This has now been lowered from one-third to one-tenth of a full-time schedule, following the Act of 18 May 2026 on divers labour stipulations.

Abolition of the general prohibition on night work and changes regarding night premium

Since 1 June 2026, there is an abolition of the general prohibition on night work.

The Act of 18 May 2026 on various labour law stipulations redefines night work, work typically carried out between 20:00 and 06:00 is considered as night work. Only for the distribution and related sectors, a separate definition is applicable: work between 23:00 and 06:00 is qualified as night work. Consequently this means, in these sectors, only the employees who work between these hours, are eligible for the night premium as set out by the applicable sectoral provisions, unless for employees who were already in service before 1 July 2026. For these employees, a transition period is foreseen.

Cap on notice periods

The notice period the employer must respect when dismissing an employee is capped at 52 weeks, for new employment contracts as of 1 June 2026. An employee with 17+ years seniority has 52 weeks of notice period. So, this will be reached for the first time in 2043 for someone who started to work with their employer in 2026.

2. Expansion of student work rules

Student work is from 2026 onwards permitted for 15 year olds who are still subject to full-time compulsory education, provided that they only perform so called "light work."

The Royal Decree of 19 April 2026 determines what is considered as "light work", non-industrial light work, i.e. the following activities which do not require any specific training and which are not performed with or on mechanical work equipment:

- Reception and cloakroom assistance;
- Shelf stocking;
- Sales assistance in retail businesses;
- Logistical activities (receipt, storage, weighing, packaging, labelling, order preparation, inventory management, or dispatch of raw materials, goods or products);
- Light cleaning duties (involving limited physical effort, requiring little force and of short duration, including dusting, dishwashing, vacuuming, mopping small

areas, emptying bins, cleaning windows at hand height, and light cleaning of sanitary facilities);

- Serving and clearing meals and beverages in the healthcare sector.

3. “Centenindex” introduced to moderate wage growth

As of 1 June 2026, a temporary limitation on automatic indexation called the “centenindex” has entered into force. The measure is laid down in the Program Law of 30 May 2026, published on 1 June 2026.

The “centenindex” interferes with the normal wage indexation by partially capping it twice, but only for salaries exceeding €4,000 gross. Mechanically, indexation is capped (e.g. at 2% on a €4,000 reference salary), with only a residual increase applied to the remaining portion. This mechanism was applied for the first time in June 2026 and will also be applied to future indexations in January 2028.

Wages up to €4,000 gross per month remain unaffected.

For the employers, an additional social security contribution: “loonmatigingsbijdrage” has been introduced. Employers must pay a “loonmatigingsbijdrage”, effectively transferring part of the savings generated by the reduced indexation to the government.

The practical impact of the “centenindex” will vary depending on the sector (e.g. monthly vs. annual indexation systems), the timing of indexation events, and the applicable indexation percentage.

4. Broadening flexi-jobs regime

The Act of 28 June 2026 abolished the before limited list of sectors in which practicing a flexi-job was possible. As of 1 July 2026, the Belgian flexi-job regime is, in principle, open to all sectors. This allows most employers to engage flexi-job workers unless their sector formally opts out.

Certain sectors, including healthcare, may remain subject to specific restrictions or additional conditions. Employers should therefore verify whether any sector-specific exclusions apply.

Sectors wishing to exclude the regime, in whole or in part, must notify the NSSO by 30 September for the exclusion to take effect on 1 January of the following year. As a transitional measure, notifications submitted by 31 August 2026 may take effect on a quarterly basis.

The reform also increases flexibility by facilitating the use of flexi-jobs within groups of companies, easing the interaction with temporary agency work and simplifying the conditions applicable to pensioners.

The remuneration ceiling of 150% of the applicable sectoral minimum wage remains unchanged. However, premiums for night work and overtime are no longer included in the calculation of this ceiling.

For employees covered by JLC 302, the hourly flexi-job remuneration may not exceed €21 per hour.

5. Key takeaways for employers

We can conclude that there are a few key developments:

- greater labour flexibility (overtime, working time, night work),
- enhanced labour market access (student work and flexi-jobs),
- controlled wage evolution (“centindex”).

Assistance

Our labour law team will be pleased to assist you with any questions regarding the new wave of social legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact us using the details below.

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