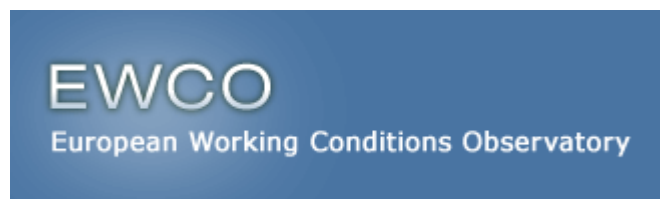


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Quality in work and employment — The Netherlands

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After an economic recession starting 2001, employment in the Netherlands is growing again since 2005. This rise in employment shows some salient aspects of the labour force, and which are caused by the greying and de-greening (reduced inflow of younger workers into the labour market) of the work force. Companies appear to want employees to be relatively young (ideal age between 20 and 35), who have high educations, are (were) not absent due to sickness and are Dutch.

1. The importance of quality in work and employment

After an economic recession starting 2001, employment in the Netherlands is growing again since 2005. This rise in employment shows some salient aspects of the labour force, and which are caused by the greying and de-greening (reduced inflow of younger workers into the labour market) of the work force. Companies appear to want employees to be relatively young (ideal age between 20 and 35), who have high educations, are (were) not absent due to sickness and are Dutch.

This type of employees is becoming scarce, and other types of employees have to be selected. The discussion in the Netherlands has been directed at recruiting these other type of employees, like older employees, lower educated employees, women, employees with chronic diseases or those who are partly diagnosed to be disabled for work, or non-native employees.

Interest in the older worker (50 years and more) is increasing. At present the labour market participation of employees in the age range from 55-65 years is low. The Government installed a committee 'Grey works' to make companies aware of how to keep the older worker at work in a healthy way for a longer period of time. Apart from the aim to keep the older workers in the work force, its aim is also to keep the social security system sustainable. At present the discussion expands itself to opportunities to keep employees at work beyond the age of 65. The Government has asked advice of the SER (Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands; http://www.ser.nl/default.asp?desc=en_index) about the latter.

Although the level of education in the Netherlands is rising, one may question if this is sufficient to provide the level (and type) of expertise and education required by the business community. The requirement is for highly educated employees, because lower skilled work is disappearing to other countries, both within and outside of the EU where labour is cheaper. Therefore it is important to educate the workers from now, in order to keep them employed. In collective agreements a lot of measures are being discussed and agreed upon that help to further educate the present employees. The label most used to address the education of employees is 'employability'. In the period 2000-2005 training and employability were addressed in almost all collective agreements (Voorjaarsrapportage CAO-afspraken 2006). The percentage of collective agreements

focussing on the training of personal development increased from 30% to 50% between 2000-2005.

There still is a large group that partly is diagnosed to be disabled for work. Despite several financial incentives to stimulate return to work, this is still a hard case (although better than in several other EU countries: < see Stress Impact project: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Psychology/stress-impact/> > . Recently changing legislation on partially disabled employees results in high costs for companies. Companies become more and more creative in replacing partly disabled employees to other, comparable companies. In the recent past, these costs were more a societal burden. Since January 2006 this has changed, and companies keep their financial responsibility for employees who (after two years) are diagnosed to be partially disabled (up to 35%).

Although the educational level of the non-native workers is rising, unemployment in this group is relatively large. Together with the social partners, the Government, through two major instruments 'the Taskforce youth unemployment' and the 'SME-covenant on minorities', is trying to tackle this problem. However, this is not accomplished yet.

Summarising: the traditional group of workers (young, highly educated etc.) that is most in demand by companies, is decreasing in size. Other groups that may fill the vacancies that occur are older workers, women, workers with chronic illnesses or partly disabled workers and non-native workers. The attention of the Government and social partners is strongly directed at securing labour market participation of these groups.

2. Career and employment security

In the Netherlands the concept of 'flexicurity' entered the national debate on employment and social policies in the 90's. Before that time the labour market witnessed a slow but continuous growth of flexible jobs for some decades. This growth took place in two directions.

The first one was the development of part-time jobs, mostly concluded by means of permanent contracts. This development was generally perceived as positive, because many people in the age group of 15-65 and involved in tasks such as education, raising children or care for dependent family members were able to combine work and private life more in line with their preferences. It raised labour market participation dramatically, providing employers with the jobs they needed and employees with additional income.

The second direction was the development of insecure jobs, such as fixed-term jobs, on call jobs and working for a temporary employment agency. Employees value these jobs because of the combination of work and private life and because these jobs often are stepping stones towards a permanent job. In order to regulate the wide variety of jobs and repair leaks in the social security system, the government, employers' organizations and trade unions agreed on the 'Law on flexibility and security', providing employers with more flexibility and employees with more employment security.

The Law came into force in 1999 and was evaluated in 2001. It was found that the development of flexible employment and the formulation of more precise contracts were stimulated. But it was also found that the knowledge about the Law was not very good, that some regulations were evaded and that the administrative burden of employers and authorities increased. A main concern was that this evaluation study took place in a period of economic growth, where security is a minor issue. For that reason a second evaluation study has been conducted in 2006, evaluating the Law in a period of economic decline.

In the current national economic and political context priorities related to employment and employment conditions are changing. The yearly increase in wages was frozen for some years, the duration of unemployment fees was cut, the use of part-time jobs was questioned in favour of full-time jobs, and the law governing dismissal was liberated. This last development also has positive effects, because employers now are more inclined to

offer permanent jobs. In this national context social partners are less involved in labour market and social policy reforms for employees. In the 90's this discussion was one of the central issues in the Dutch polder model, where government, employers' and employees' representatives negotiated on optimal solutions for improving economy. This fading of interest at the national level is partly an effect of the Law on flexibility and security itself, because this 'framework' law sets the outlines for negotiating custom-made solutions at the sector level. However, nowadays most developments are initiated one-sided by governmental (read political) action, illustrating the three different positions of the social partners in this economical debate. Or to oversimplify: social partners divide the earned money in good times and the government controls the national economy in bad times.

3. Health and well being

Physical load and high psychosocial risks are still sizable problems in the Netherlands. We define 'physical load' here as the broad range of risks related to the need to apply force, repetitive movements, vibrations, working in the same posture for a long time, or in awkward position for some time, like working with VDU's. High psychosocial risks relate to high job demands, low autonomy, and aggression and violence at work. The Government and social partners succeeded in putting physical and psychosocial risks for well being and health on the agenda of many companies. This was done through health and safety covenants, gentlemen 's agreements at the sector level between employers, employees and Government on how and to what extent to reduce exposure of workers to these risks. These covenants generally covered a four year period. In recent years a lot of investments took place by companies, sectors and the Government to succeed in the management of physical and psychosocial risks. At present, some positive examples are the successes in the horeca sector ([NL0602NU02.htm](#)) and the police sector ([NL0512NU01](#)). Preliminary evaluation of the covenants also indicates that sickness absence decreased more in those sectors that had agreed to a health and safety covenant (http://arboconvenanten.szw.nl/index.cfm?fuseaction=dsp_rubriek&rubriek_id=100073).

Next to the health and safety covenants, the Government has initiated two other projects: (1) the programme on 'Reinforcement Occupational Safety' and the programme on 'Reinforcement OSH (occupational safety and health) Management Dangerous Substances'. The first programme aims to put into operation 20 safety management initiatives resulting in a reduction in occupational accidents. The second programme aims to structurally improve the safe and healthy management of dangerous substances. In both programmes a close cooperation of employers and employees within sectors is aimed for. At present both programmes have resulted in an increased awareness of OSH in companies and at the sectoral level, without the Government having to make new legislation.

In January 2007 a new Working Conditions Act will become into force. Self-activation is also a key guideline of this act. The health and safety covenants will be replaced by 'Health and safety catalogues' that will have to be prepared by employers and employees at the sectoral level. In these catalogues ways will be described how employers can meet the targets defined by the Government, e.g. how to use techniques, methods, good practices, to reach norm values for certain occupational risks or (work-related) outcomes. A practical advantage will be that sectors in which a health and safety catalogue' has been agreed upon will be less frequently be inspected by the Labour Inspectorate.

It is to be expected that many employers and employees will collaborate and choose to have the sector 'health and safety catalogue' be closely linked to the digital 'Risk Inventory and Evaluation' (RI&E), when available. After all, it is very convenient for companies to have the directions for solution of identified occupational risks laid out clearly.

4. Skills development

The disappearance of low-skilled (manual) work to countries where labour is cheap(er) than in the Netherlands, resulted in an increased attention to the qualifications for future

Dutch employees, i.e. of young workers entering the labour market as well as the migrant workers. This attention is needed not only from the perspective of the labour market, but also because there are many young people that do not finish their education. In 2003 a Task force Youth Unemployment is established which aims to keep young people out of unemployment (http://docs.szw.nl/pdf/35/2003/35_2003_3_4465.pdf). This is realised by offering jobs to young workers where the combination of learning and working are the central issues. The task force has met its goals within a period of three years.

Next to the 'Task force Youth Unemployment' the Government will put more money into knowledge, skills and qualifications in the year 2007. Learning and working trajectories will be stimulated and it will be made financially attractive for employers to offer schooling and apprenticeships. Additionally, attention will be given to so-called EVC-procedures (EVC = competencies achieved elsewhere), where people who obtained skills outside the schooling system will get a certificate.

Many young people receive a certificate this way. However, the labour market wants people with a technical or 'beta' training. Only a small number of young people choose these kinds of training. This results in a situation in which there is a shortage of professions like construction workers and plumbers. Workers from Eastern Europe, in many cases workers from Poland, fill in these gaps. The Government increasingly lets go of her restrictive policy on allowing Eastern European workers to work in the Netherlands. At the same time less Dutch students choose and finish a technical or 'beta' University education, despite the increasing demand for this kind of knowledge and skills. Higher educated workers from abroad with this knowledge and skills are therefore attracted to the Dutch labour force as well. Here too, the Dutch Government makes it easier for experts from abroad to enter the Dutch labour market.

Next to attention for qualifications of new personnel, more and more attention is paid to the qualifications of the workers who are presently employed. This attention often coincides with attention for the subject of product improvement. The latter means that product improvement is not only to be achieved by technical innovation, but also by social innovation. Social innovation can be defined as: modernization of the work organization and optimal use of competencies, directed at the improvement of the organization's achievements and development of talent'. In 2006 employers and employees representatives, universities and knowledge institutions installed the 'Centre for Social Innovation' directed at clustering and dissemination of knowledge and information. In a still to be published advice on the mid-term Dutch economy the SER (Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands) pays a lot of attention to schooling and educating workers.

Next to these developments, in September 2006 a website is opened at which employers and employees can find apprenticeships, courses and education (<http://www.opleidingenberoep.nl/ts/ob/>).

5. Work life balance

Combining work and family life is an issue to some extent, but mainly an issue in election time. There is the attention of the Ministry (SZW) for combining work and family life, e.g. in the Emancipation monitor (<http://www.scp.nl/boeken/9037701906.shtml>). More generally, there is specific attention for increased labour participation of women. The government/cabinet formulated some target figures for 2010 in their policy plan on Emancipation regarding paid labour, income, unpaid labour and the share of women in the political and societal decision making. Below we describe some general conclusions of the Emancipation monitor on these subtopics, and their main conclusion.

- Paid labour: labour participation of women has increased, despite the economic recession, although it increased much less than in the early part of the nineties. The increase took place for all groups (by age, education, with and without children, irrespective of ethnicity). The recession mainly had an impact on the labour participation of men (probably because of gender segregation, and the decrease of jobs in traditional male dominated sectors of industry, e.g. manufacturing),

resulting in a decreased gender gap in labour participation.

- The gender pay gap decreased in recent years, but is still present. The share of economically independent women is, however 41%, which is 3% less than the target figure in 2000. In ethnic minorities the share of economically independent women is even lower.
- Unpaid labour: Women with children have unpaid (domestic and volunteer) work almost as often as women without children. A redistribution of unpaid labour is therefore necessary. The target figure for unpaid labour by men is 36,4% in 2000, which is slightly higher than the actual figure: 35%. In a recent study described in the Emancipation Monitor only 10% of the women would work more, or would (re) start working when their husband would take up household and caring tasks. Forty percent of the women, however, indicate that they would increase their working hours or (re)start work when they would be able to better combine their working hours with their private lives or have the opportunity to take leave when their child gets ill.
- Political and societal decision making: The share of women in the cabinet, the Dutch Lower House/Chamber and the European Parliament is even higher than the target figures for 2004. For all other jobs (share of women in business, societal bodies, and (other) political bodies) the situation is not so positive.

The main conclusion as presented in the latest Emancipation Monitor is that the emancipation process has been slowed down. This is not only because of the economic recession. One additional factor is the fact that the government is withdrawing itself. The conditions for emancipation have been improved because of previous policy. Also because of the increased educational level of women, the emancipation process can go on by itself. Decisive support from the government is, however, absent.

Annex – Country data

Place of work and work organisation	EU27	NL
q11f. Working at company/organisation premises	72.8	63.8
q11g. Teleworking from home	8.3	14.0
q11j. Dealing directly with people who are not employees (e.g. customers)	62.4	66.1
q11k. Working with computers	45.5	71.6
q11l. Using internet/email for work	36.0	55.5
q20a_a. Short repetitive tasks of <1m	24.7	16.3
q20a_b. Short repetitive tasks of <10m	39.0	44.8
q20b_a. Working at very high speed	59.6	60.9
q20b_b. Working to tight deadlines	61.8	61.2
q21a. Pace of work dependent on colleagues	42.2	43.4
q21b. Pace of work dependent on direct demands from customers, etc.	68.0	75.7
q21c. Pace of work dependent on numerical production/performance targets	42.1	47.3
q21d. Pace of work dependent on automated equipment/machine	18.8	15.6
q21e. Pace of work dependent on boss	35.7	18.3
q22a. Have to interrupt a task in order to take on an unforeseen task	32.7	53.1

q24a. Can choose/change order of tasks	63.4	79.2
q24b. Can choose/change methods of work	66.9	73.5
q24c. Can choose/change speed of work	69.2	74.7
q25a. Can get assistance from colleagues if asked	67.6	84.7
q25b. Can get assistance from superiors/boss if asked	56.1	71.0
q25c. Can get external assistance if asked	31.6	51.1
q25d. Has influence over choice of working partners	24.2	37.6
q25e. Can take break when wishes	44.6	56.8
q25f. Has enough time to get the job done	69.6	64.5
q26a. Task rotation	43.7	62.3
q26b. Teamwork	55.2	75.2
q31. Immediate boss is a woman	24.5	21.7
Job content and training		
q23a. Meeting precise quality standards	74.2	76.4
q23b. Assessing quality of own work	71.8	72.7
q23c. Solving unforeseen problems	80.8	93.9
q23d. Monotonous tasks	42.9	22.7
q23e. Complex tasks	59.4	65.0
q23f. Learning new things	69.1	83.6
q25j. Able to apply own ideas in work	58.4	70.8
q27. Job-skills match: need more training	13.1	10.2
q27. Job-skills match: correspond well	52.3	56.4
q27. Job-skills match: could cope with more demanding duties	34.6	33.4
q28a1. Has undergone paid-for training in previous 12 months	26.1	31.6
Violence, harrassment and discrimination		
q29a. Threats of physical violence	6.0	12.2
q29b. Physical violence from colleagues	1.8	6.3
q29c. Physical violence from other people	4.3	6.6
q29d. Bullying/harassment	5.1	12.0
q29f. Unwanted sexual attention	1.8	1.4
q29g. Age discrimination	2.7	3.6
Physical work factors		
q10a. Vibrations	24.2	15.9
q10b. Noise	30.1	20.0
q10c. High temperatures	24.9	23.6
q10d. Low temperatures	22.0	17.0
q10e. Breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust, etc.	19.1	13.7
q10f. Breathing in vapours such as solvents and thinners	11.2	6.7
q10g. Handling chemical substances	14.5	8.7
q10h. Radiation	4.6	4.2
q10i. Tobacco smoke from other people	20.1	15.6
q10j. Infectious materials	9.2	10.4
q11a. Tiring or painful positions	45.5	24.8

q11b. Lifting or moving people	8.1	6.6
q11c. Carrying or moving heavy loads	35.0	22.0
q11d. Standing or walking	72.9	59.1
q11e. Repetitive hand or arm movements	62.3	60.7
q11m. Wearing personal protective clothing or equipment	34.0	25.7
Information and communication		
q30b. Consulted about changes in work organisation, etc.	47.1	82.9
q30c. Subject to regular formal assessment of performance	40.0	52.6
q12. Well-informed about health and safety risks	83.1	78.0
Health		
q32. Consider health or safety at risk because of work	28.6	22.6
q33. Work affects health	35.4	24.9
q33a_a... hearing problems	7.2	3.8
q33a_b... problems with vision	7.8	2.0
q33a_c... skin problems	6.6	3.4
q33a_d... backache	24.7	13.8
q33a_e... headaches	15.5	8.7
q33a_f... stomach ache	5.8	2.7
q33a_g... muscular pains	22.8	15.6
q33a_h... respiratory difficulties	4.7	3.9
q33a_i... heart disease	2.4	1.3
q33a_j...injury(ies)	9.7	4.8
q33a_k...stress	22.3	16.2
q33a_l...overall fatigue	22.5	14.8
q33a_m...sleeping problems	8.7	6.9
q33a_n...allergies	4.0	2.5
q33a_o...anxiety	7.8	2.6
q33a_p... Irritability	10.5	9.6
q35. Able to do same job when 60	58.2	72.1
q34a_d. Absent for health problems in previous year	22.9	33.7
q34b_ef. Average days health-related absence in previous year	4.6	8.6
Work and family life		
q18. Working hours fit family/social commitments well or very well	79.4	84.6
q19. Contacted about work outside normal working hours	22.1	39.3
ef4c. Caring for and educating your children every day for an hour or more	28.8	45.3
ef4d. Cooking and housework	46.4	55.8
Job satisfaction		
q36. Satisfied or very satisfied with working conditions	82.3	89.2
q37a_ef. I might lose my job in the next 6 months	13.7	17.8
q37b_ef. I am well paid for the work I do	43.2	58.0
q37c_ef. My job offers good prospects for career advancement	31.0	34.6
Structure of workforce		

q2d_ef. Seniority (mean years)	9.7	9.7
Working time		
q8a_ef. Mean usual weekly working hours	38.6	33.0
q8b. % usually working five days per week	65.1	52.8
q9a. % with more than one job	6.2	9.9
q13_ef. Daily commuting time (return, in minutes)	41.6	50.7
q14e_ef. Long working days	16.9	12.7
q16a_a. Work same number of hours each day	58.4	48.5
q16a_b. Work same number of days each week	74.0	72.1
q16a_c. Work fixed starting and finishing times	60.7	51.4
q16a_d. Work shifts	17.3	11.8
q17a. % with less flexible schedules	65.3	46.5

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