

# Addressing teacher shortages

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 NETHERLANDS

## Timeline



ID number 28458

## Background

There is a shortage of teachers in secondary education for specific subjects (such as foreign languages, physics, mathematics). A shortage of teachers for foreign languages and technical science subjects is also expected for upper secondary vocational education.

## Description

In February 2017, the education ministry published an action plan on teacher shortage. The plan is being implemented to encourage regional stakeholders to stimulate circular careers and hybrid teaching to tackle shortages of (technical) teachers.

### 2017 Implementation

### 2018 Implementation

### 2019 Implementation

In 2019, VET schools and neighbouring general secondary education schools could apply for a subsidy to tackle teacher shortages in their region. VET schools and general secondary schools had to submit a joint plan to claim a subsidy. The subsidy for an action plan in the secondary education sector amounted to a maximum of EUR 250 000 per region. If one or more school boards from upper secondary vocational education participated, an additional subsidy of up to EUR 75 000 per region could be granted.

### 2020 Implementation

The education ministry has intensified its effort to tackle learner shortages in education and teacher training. Changes to the supplementary budget for the education ministry in 2020 concern a one-off increase in the subsidy for second-career teachers for the primary, secondary and secondary vocational education sectors. As a result, the number of newly started second-career teachers has increased.

Regionally, the cooperation between (VET) schools and teacher training institutes has also been intensified by jointly drawing up regional plans to tackle teacher shortages, supported by subsidies available in 2020 and 2021.

Various measures are aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the profession. A bill is being developed on a strategic policy on human resources at school level, including primary, secondary and secondary vocational education schools. The school inspectorate will be responsible for supervising the implementation of the law by schools.

The Teacher force action plan, agreed between the education ministry, school associations and labour unions, includes funds for the primary, secondary and secondary vocational education sectors with the aim of increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. The action plan wants to achieve this by improving remuneration and reducing the workload. Most of the funds have been used to enable faster growth in salaries for teachers. Resources have also been spent on hiring more teachers to reduce the workload in the more densely populated west of the country, where the workload and teacher shortages are generally higher.

In July 2020, Merel van Vroonhoven, who was appointed by the Education Ministry as independent driver to speed up and intensify the approach to reducing teacher shortages, published her recommendations, focusing on 4 directions:

- (a) develop sustainable, regional cooperation between education parties through the creation of a nationwide regional network in which the existing regional networks for the shortages on the education labour market (*RAP-regions*) and 'Train and professionalise teachers together' (*Samen Opleiden & Professionaliseren - SO&P*, cooperation between teacher training colleges and schools) are integrated;
- (b) more focus on teacher training trajectories and on a better match between the study programme and practice;
- (c) involve the currently working professionals in education and give more attention to topics like education to students in a precarious position, students in special education, retaining teachers, the shortage of school principals and specific subjects with acute shortages in secondary education;
- (d) set up a task force to direct the intensifying of the action plan from a common vision and approach: include all separate initiatives under the direction of this task force.

## 2021 Design

Based on the recommendations of the independent expert appointed by the education ministry in 2020, the combined sector organisations, including the VET Council (MBO Raad) jointly drafted the action plan 'Sustainable working in education' (*Actieplan Duurzaam werken in het onderwijs*). The plan is aimed at making the teaching profession attractive again, attracting and retaining more teachers. Besides general bottlenecks, like offering a fitting salary and reducing workload, in VET, shortages of teachers in STEM subjects need to be addressed. There are three main elements:

- (a) an inspiring framework of the teaching profession is being developed in cooperation with teachers, schools and educators. In this framework, it is made clear what different career development opportunities are possible for teachers, but also what qualifications and competences teachers have acquired;
- (b) based on the framework of the teaching profession, a blueprint for teacher training programmes is developed, by which more uniformity is reached in the different teacher training programmes and fragmentation is reduced. The continuing professional development of teachers is put in the spotlight through this blueprint;
- (c) a nationwide network of approximately 7 education regions is founded. These regions combine cooperation in effective educational labour market policies with putting a powerful infrastructure in place for knowledge development and application.

In a policy letter to parliament of 14 June 2021, the education minister acknowledges

the action plan but informs parliament that employee representatives have not underwritten the plan; in their view there is too little attention paid to bridging the salary gap between primary and secondary education teachers, and to the high workload. They support the majority of the plan content-wise. Therefore, a concrete follow-up trajectory will be developed starting in the next school year. The minister states that the next government will have to decide on the implementation of the plan and on the proposed investments by the involved parties.

In a policy letter to parliament of December 14, 2021, the education minister addresses the long-term predictions of the number of teachers needed in VET. It is expected that the peak in demand for teachers will be reached in 2022, after which it will decline to a relatively constant lower level, because of decreasing student numbers and retirements among current teachers. For VET as a whole, no shortages are foreseen, but for specific subjects the shortages will increase, comparable to increasing shortages in general secondary education. The same holds for certain specialistic subjects in VET.

## 2022 Design

In June 2022 the education minister announced a new comprehensive agenda to address the labour market shortages in Dutch primary education, secondary education and upper secondary vocational education. Part of the new agenda are plans to form a new structure of regional partnerships in which the partnerships 'Train and professionalise teachers together' (*Samen Opleiden & Professionaliseren - SO&P*) are combined with the partnerships formed to address personnel shortages in education (*RAP regions: 'Regional personnel shortages in education' (Regionale Aanpak Personeelstekorten onderwijs)*). In a follow-up letter to parliament in December 2022 the education minister describes the plans to form the new partnership among educational regions.

The formation of the new educational partnership regions should contribute to simplifying the current fragmentation of regional forms of cooperation and associated approaches and funding flows. According to the follow-up letter of December 2022, the education ministry in consultation with the involved stakeholders determine which education regions are formed and how they shape governance. In doing so, following principles are applied:

- (a) the parties agree that a voluntary form of cooperation at regional level is necessary to tackle the shortage of personnel.
- (b) tackling the shortages is a major theme in all sectors (primary education, secondary education and upper secondary vocational education). In addition, there is also a decrease in students in all sectors. These differences require a regional approach, with central direction from a national framework.
- (c) the main principles the education ministry uses are: linking up with the existing partnerships and its quality (such as growth towards 100% training students via, 'Train and professionalise teachers together' (SO&P) and national coverage.
- (d) an Education Region (RATO: *Regionale Aanpak Toekomst*)
- (e) education labour market (*Onderwijsarbeidsmarkt*) consists of representatives of primary and secondary school boards, MBO institutions, teacher training institutes and (representatives of) the profession (school leaders, teachers, educational support staff and trainers).
- (f) based on substantive developments (continuous learning pathways for students), to stimulate mobility between sectors and to make working in education more attractive (continuous learning pathways for teachers), it has been suggested to create an Education Region (RATO) across the sectors. An Education Region (RATO) can also (still) be organized on a sectoral basis (RATO primary education and RATO secondary education with vocational education) if this appears desirable based on the outcomes of the assessment of the regional needs.
- (g) the Education Regions are geographical regions in which the RAP and SO&P partnerships are integrated and which are part of the larger Teacher Training Alliances.
- (h) activities are in any case aimed at recruiting, matching, training, supervising and professionalizing teaching staff. Within the RATO, the ambition is to train 100% of

the students through the 'Train and professionalise teachers together' (*Samen Opleiden & Professionaliseren*) system.

- (i) the RATO also offers (future) teaching staff an accessible counter for all development opportunities in each of the education regions.
- (j) in order to be able to hire teaching staff for the RATO (and not directly by a school board), suitable for the regional challenges, such as lateral entrants, and to create a replacement pool or receive resources, a legal entity is required for the RATO, for example in the form of a central service or a lead party. In the event that teaching staff is employed within the RATO's supra-administrative level, this is done on a voluntary basis. Within the RATO it is determined who has decision-making power.
- (k) the education ministry aims at sustainable funding for the education regions with incentives that promote cooperation and reduce competition. The starting point is a bundling of existing schemes and resources, starting with the resources for RAP and SO&P (including the increase included in the budget). In view of the role, size and significance of the RATO, school boards may choose to have part of the regular personnel tasks (with accompanying budget) performed by the RATO; the budget then follows the tasks.

Furthermore, there are already a number of successful initiatives in the field to get asylum seekers with a residence permit to teach. The possibility of developing a programme that guides beneficiaries (with a teaching qualification from the country of origin) to a position as a teacher or to a lateral entry in profession/part-time trajectory is explored. The initiators and the teacher training programmes involved are exploring the role that new regional partnerships can play in this.

### 2023 Implementation

Vacancies in VET have doubled over the past decade, with 5 530 openings in 2022. Of these, 43% were for teachers, totalling a demand for 1 750 full-time equivalents. The most sought-after subjects included Dutch, healthcare, economics, technical fields, and mathematics. Estimates of future teacher shortages in VET are challenging due to the open labour market and the lack of a national subject structure. While retirements are expected to impact staffing, declining student numbers currently allow VET schools to meet their needs. However, subjects experiencing shortages in general secondary education, like Dutch and Computer Science, may also face issues in VET. Lateral entry into the teaching profession in VET is on the rise, with 900 subsidies granted in 2022. Applications for lateral entry in 2023 have reached record levels, although exact figures are not yet available. To further assess potential shortages, a pilot project is planned for next spring.

Significant progress has been made in the development of education regions (formerly known as RATO's) in the Netherlands. As of 2023, 27 pioneering education regions have been established, with two more regions in the process of formation. These regions bring together key stakeholders, including employers, educators, municipalities, employment services, and businesses, to address education challenges in the local labour market by focusing on recruiting, training, and professionalising educational staff tailored to regional needs. Each region is developing customised approaches based on its unique challenges, such as student population declines in the northern regions or anticipated increases in areas like Eindhoven. These efforts aim to create a nationwide network of education regions by January 2025, supported by measurable result agreements to ensure accountability.

Additionally, the education ministry is extending its collaboration with the G5 (the five largest cities), where joint strategies have already been implemented.

The Realization Unit (RE), a specialised body or team established to provide guidance, support, and oversight for the implementation of specific initiatives or programmes, has been established. Finally, a programme council will begin reporting on the progress in early 2024. These initiatives will help shape strategies for the broader rollout of education regions across the country.

## 2024 Implementation

In January, the meanwhile 29 education regions received funding to implement a joint approach to address key challenges. The Realization Unit supports these regions in establishing and further developing regional structures and addressing teacher shortages. The initiative is built on two key pillars:

(a) further development of the learning approach: education regions are actively working to address staff shortages by developing expertise and sharing experiences about what works and what doesn't. The Realization Unit works together with the regions to monitor results, track progress, identify challenges and address support needs.

(b)

launch of the programme Council: the council serves as an advisory group for the Realization Unit and the education regions. It provides advice on measurable outcome agreements and on how a learning region operates.

The overarching goal is to form more education regions by 2025, creating a comprehensive national network. This initiative aims to ensure that all schools participate in regional labour market cooperation, reducing fragmented efforts and fostering a more integrated approach.

On June 10, the subsidy scheme for creating a national network of education regions was published, with further details about additional subsidies for regions taking extra steps expected in autumn.

Additional funds for tackling shortages in the G5 cities (major urban areas) have been extended by 17 months, until January 2026. After this period, the G5 approach will be aligned with the education regions' framework to ensure consistency and integration.

In a policy letter published in December 2024, the minister of education gave an update on the current teacher shortages. For the first time, a national measurement of teacher shortages was conducted in MBO. Based on responses covering 32% of students, the measured shortage of teachers is 4.1% (900-1 400 FTE), with regional training centres (ROCs) facing higher shortages (4.3%) than vocational colleges (2.6%). Instructor shortages are lower at 2.9% (40-100 FTE). While most teams report no shortages, a significant minority face gaps exceeding 10-20% of their workforce.

The nature of these shortages is regional and complex, requiring tailored solutions. Education regions are mapping out needs for recruitment, training, and retention, increasingly in collaboration with labour market partners, such as regional work centres. A regional work centre is a place where employees, job seekers, and employers can go for help and advice.

Examples include shared internship compensation and regional substitute teacher pools. To support regional efforts, the government has consolidated over 200 networks into 50 education regions, streamlining funding and support. It is planned that a one-time subsidy will be available in 2025 for institutions not yet part of an education region, and a 'plus scheme' will support ambitious regions in deepening their approach. Structural funding and performance agreements are being prepared to ensure long-term impact. An evaluation will assess the effectiveness of education regions. The cabinet sees strong potential in this regional approach and emphasises the need for solidarity and collaboration to address persistent shortages.

## 2025 Implementation

The July 2025 progress policy letter reports milestones in the national teacher strategy. There are now 50 active education regions, covering 98% of MBO students. Of these, 44 regions have announced additional short-term activities, including efforts to address shortages in specific subjects and to support second career teachers (lateral entrants). Six regions are piloting stronger relations between VET and labour market regions, aiming to guide new VET teaching staff from outside education into

suitable training and employment. These pilots explore the role municipalities can take and how coordination can be embedded in long-term regional agreements, as the key new element of these pilots is the direct involvement of labour market regions.

A multi-year evaluation of the education regions is also underway. Early findings have informed the new 2026–2029 education region subsidy scheme, which now places greater emphasis on measurable outcomes such as increased lateral entry and improved teacher support. It is planned that all regions receive a baseline analysis of their local education labour market to help tailor their strategies. To strengthen regional impact, education regions are required to formulate multi-year ambition agreements by October 2026. These agreements are intended guide efforts to address local challenges and may lead to adjustments in approach where needed.

The Instructors grant (*Instructeursbeurs*) subsidy scheme has been extended for one year to cover the 2025–2026 study year. It supports VET instructors pursuing a bachelor's or associate degree by covering study costs and leave. Between 2019 and 2024, 170 instructors used the subsidy—around 6% of the target group—mainly to transition into teaching positions. Based on positive results, reported in an evaluation research commissioned by the ministry of Education and produced by Berenschot in 2024, the scheme can be integrated into the broader *SOOL* (Susidieregeling Onderwijspersoneel Opleiding tot Leraar; Subsidy arrangement for Education Support Staff to qualify for Teaching) arrangement for teacher training, aligning with its primary use and reducing administrative costs. To increase uptake, the government is working with the Association of VET colleges (MBO Raad), the Professional Association of Teachers (BVMBO), and education regions. Suggestions to support modular programmes and encourage collective agreements on professional development are left to institutions and social partners to consider.

## Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

## Target group

### Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

### Education professionals

Teachers

Trainers

School leaders

## Thematic categories

### Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

Attractiveness of the teaching and training profession/career

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

## Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Letter to parliament on the new approach to teacher shortages](#)

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[Explanatory memorandum on the fourth incidental supplementary budget for the education ministry due to intensification of tackling shortages](#)

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[Policy letter on the status of salary mix in VET, education ministry, March 2020](#)

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[Policy letter on teacher policy and labour market for teachers, education ministry, 9 December 2020](#)

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[Policy letter on votes and commitments for secondary vocational education, education ministry, 9 December 2020](#)

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[Working agenda teacher policy, June 2022, education ministry](#)

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[Policy letter on teacher policy, education ministry, 13 December 2022](#)

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[Report working agenda teacher policy, December 2022, education ministry](#)

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[Report on teacher labour market, 15 December 2023, education ministry](#)

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[Policy letter, education ministry, 15 December 2023](#)

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[Policy letter, education ministry, 26 June 2024](#)

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[Policy letter on teacher policy, education ministry, 17 December 2024](#)

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[Policy letter on teacher policy, education ministry, 3 July 2025](#)

## Related policy developments

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**2025 Implementation**

### National approach to teacher professionalisation

The National approach to teacher professionalisation (NAPL) consists of four pillars. The four pillars are:

 NETHERLANDS

#### Type of development

Strategy/Action plan

“ … ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Addressing teacher shortages: Netherlands. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28458>