



# SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS

# THE NETHERLANDS

2026

## Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

## Recent employment developments

Throughout the past decade, the unemployment rate has consistently remained below the EU average (4 % in 2023 compared with 6 % in EU-27). 6 % of low-qualified workers were unemployed – half the EU average of 12 % and twice the rate for medium- or highly qualified workers in the country. While 15- to 24-year-olds had the highest unemployment rate among age groups at 8 %, this was still much lower than the corresponding EU-27 average of 15 %. The long-term unemployment rate has decreased in recent years, reaching 14 % of all unemployed people in 2023, far below the EU average of 35 %.

In 2023, nearly half of the workforce was employed in one of four sectors<sup>(1)</sup>: health and social care, wholesale and retail trade, professional services, and manufacturing (Figure 1). Health and social care was the largest employer, with 17 % of the workforce compared with 11 % in the EU-27. Of these four sectors, only manufacturing had a share below the EU average (8 % versus 16 %). Professionals made up 31 % of the Dutch workforce, compared with 22 % in the EU-27, highlighting the focus of the economy on high-skilled roles. The shares of professionals (19 % versus 16 %) and associate professionals (28 % versus 20 %) in the health sector were the

highest in the EU. Nearly 1 in 3 legal and social professionals, and 1 in 2 legal and social associate professionals worked in the health sector. These shares were much higher than in most other EU countries.

Women accounted for 47 % of the workforce in 2023. Women are particularly well-represented in health and social care (81 % compared with 78 % in the EU-27) and education (64 % versus 73 %). Men dominate employment in most economic sectors, for example in finance and insurance (62 %, one of the highest shares among Member States; 48 % in the EU), manufacturing (77 % versus 70 %) and ICT services (75 % versus 70 %).

In 2023, the proportion of workers aged 15 to 24 (17 %) significantly exceeded the EU average (8 %). Youth employment has grown at an annual rate of 3 % since 2013 (1 % in the EU-27). Workers aged 25 to 49 had the highest share in employment (49 %), below the EU average of 57 %. The share of workers aged 50 to 64 has continued to grow in line with the wider EU trend (30 % compared with 32 % in the EU-27). The share of workers aged 65 and over in employment (4 % versus 3 %) has nearly doubled in the 2013 to 2023 period.

In 2023, the overqualification rate among tertiary graduates was 14 %, notably lower than the EU average of 23 %. This may partly be because workers with an academic education in jobs requiring a vocational higher qualification are not considered overqualified. The share of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was 4 %, significantly below the EU average of 9 % and the lowest among all Member States. This highlights the importance of sustaining policies that prevent early school leaving and focusing on smooth school-to-work transitions, where VET also plays a key role (Dicks & Levels, 2022).

(1) To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see Annex 2 of [Cedefop's skills forecast methodological framework](#) (April 2023).

## Recent skills and learning developments

Analysis of Dutch [online job advertisements](#) (OJAs) posted in 2023 shows that 19 % were for jobs in manufacturing and 18 % for distribution and transport, surpassing the EU averages of 16 % and 15 %. Professionals (27 %), plant and machine operators and assemblers (14 %), and associate professionals (14 %) are among the most sought-after occupations. Compared to other Member States, the share of OJAs for plant and machine operators and assemblers is one of the highest. OJAs indicate that demand for professionals is primarily driven by ICT professionals (9 % of OJAs for professionals), and researchers and engineers (6 %). OJAs for plant and machine operators and assemblers often seek drivers and vehicle operators (5 %) or machine and plant operators (8 %), and these shares are among the highest in the EU. The most frequently demanded skills across all occupations were accessing and analysing digital data, and using digital tools for collaboration, content creation and problem-solving.

According to Cedefop's 2024 [European Skills Index](#) (ESI), the Netherlands ranked 11th out of 31 countries, with a total score of 63 out of 100 points, improving its ranking from the 15th position in 2017. The country ranked first in the skills activation pillar, scoring higher in the indicators of the activity rate of 25- to 54-year-olds and early leaving from education or training. The relatively low score in qualification mismatch (21st) could signal an area of improvement for particular occupations or fields of study.

In 2023, the share of workers with above-basic digital skills was among the highest in the EU and almost double the EU average (61 % compared with 33 % in the EU). Those aged 25 to 34 had the highest share of 61 %, far above the EU average of 39 %. Participation in education and training over the past four weeks for the employed population stood at 29 %, more than double the EU average of 14 %. The high level of engagement in education and training could be used to promote upskilling and keep the population up to date with the latest technological developments. This is especially important in the context of population ageing and increasing employment of older workers.

## Future employment trends

Between 2022 and 2035, Cedefop's skills forecast projects a weak annual labour force growth of below 1 %, close to the EU average. The labour force aged 35 to 44 and 60 to 64 is expected to grow by over 1 % per year. In contrast, the 15 to 24 and 50 to 59 age groups in the labour force are expected to contract. Mirroring EU trends driven by demographic shifts, the number of people aged 65 and over is expected to grow by 7 % each year.

Aggregate employment is expected to increase by 5 % between 2022 and 2035. Contractions are likely in administrative and support service activities (-5 %), manufacturing (-3 %), and transportation and storage (-5 %). Driven by the green transition, employment in the energy sector is expected to skyrocket (+105 %) – one of the highest growth rates among Member States. ICT (+22 %), and health (+13 %) will follow among the sectors with the largest percentage increases in employment. Although the administrative and support services sector in the country will shrink in absolute terms, it will still have the largest employment share in the EU.

The top five occupations in terms of projected employment growth are assemblers (+106 %), ICT technicians (+52 %), legal, social and cultural professionals (+32 %), ICT professionals (+31 %) and science and engineering professionals (+26 %). Significant declines in employment are expected for market-oriented skilled agricultural workers (-37 %), metal, machinery and related trades workers (-35 %), and other clerical support workers (-34 %).

## Future skills and learning trends

In 2035, over half of job openings (56 %) will require high qualifications, surpassing the EU average of 46 %. The shift is driven primarily by a decline in openings for low-qualified jobs and, to a lesser extent, by a reduction of job openings

for medium-qualified jobs. By 2035, 65 % of job openings are projected to be for highly skilled non-manual occupations, surpassing the EU average of 50 %.

The projected employment growth of 9 % of the [Netherlands' high-tech economy](#) in the 2022 to 2035 period reflects the strong focus on highly qualified labour. Although this is below the EU average of 11 %, the foreseen expansion will further strengthen the country's already robust high-tech economy. High-tech manufacturing is projected to grow by 2 % (EU average at 5 %) and knowledge-intensive services by 14 % (EU average at 18 %). These developments underline the potential for innovation-driven economic growth and increase the need for up- and reskilling with a focus on advanced digital skills and new technologies.

The Netherlands is expected to continue the transition towards a more highly educated labour force up to 2035. The share of the labour force with medium-level qualifications will remain well below the EU average. While the supply of highly skilled workers is expected to broadly meet the demand for those qualifications, according to Cedefop's skills forecast, the country faces labour market tightness, which hinders economic development.

cultural and related associate professionals. High shortages will also complicate the recruitment of workers for low-skilled occupations, such as cleaners and helpers, refuse workers and other elementary jobs.

## Expected skill shortages

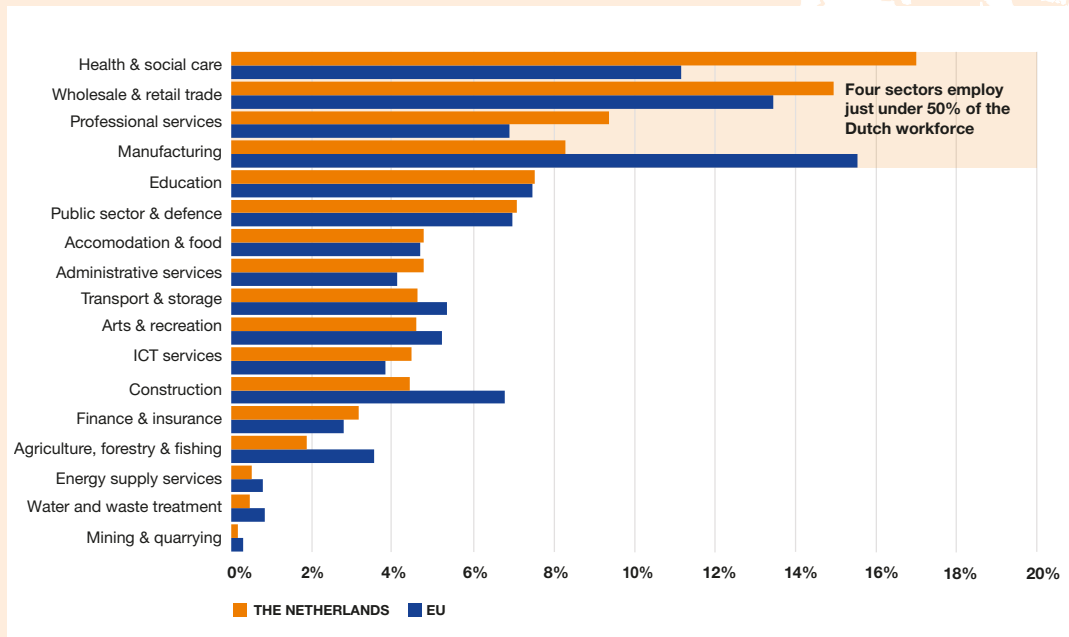
According to [Cedefop's Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#), the highest level of labour shortages – reflected in hiring difficulties – is expected for plant and machine operators and assemblers, and for elementary occupations and professionals (Figure 3). Here, shortages are mainly driven by an imbalance between labour supply and demand. Employers recruiting for in-demand medium-skilled occupations, such as drivers and mobile plant operators, stationary plant and machine operators, general and keyboard clerks, and personal care workers, will face the highest shortages. At the high-skilled end of the labour market, the most pressing shortages are anticipated for legal, social and cultural professionals, production and specialised services managers, and legal, social,



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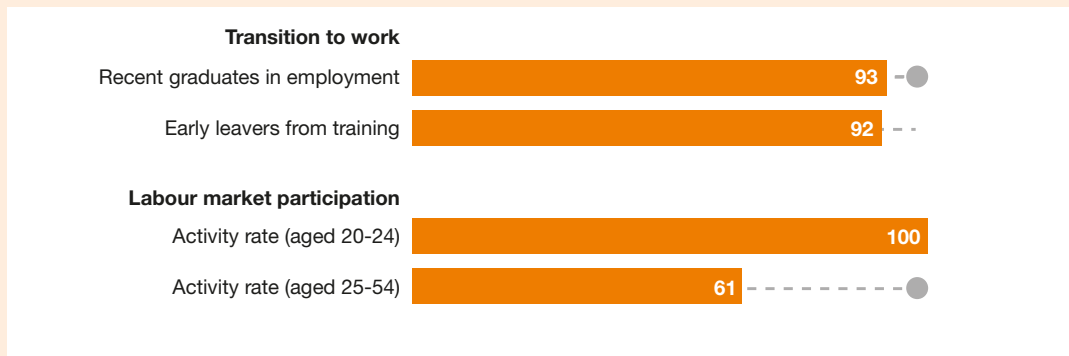
## Jobs and skills in figures

### Distribution of employment across sectors in the Netherlands and the EU, 2023, (%)



Source: [Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool](#).

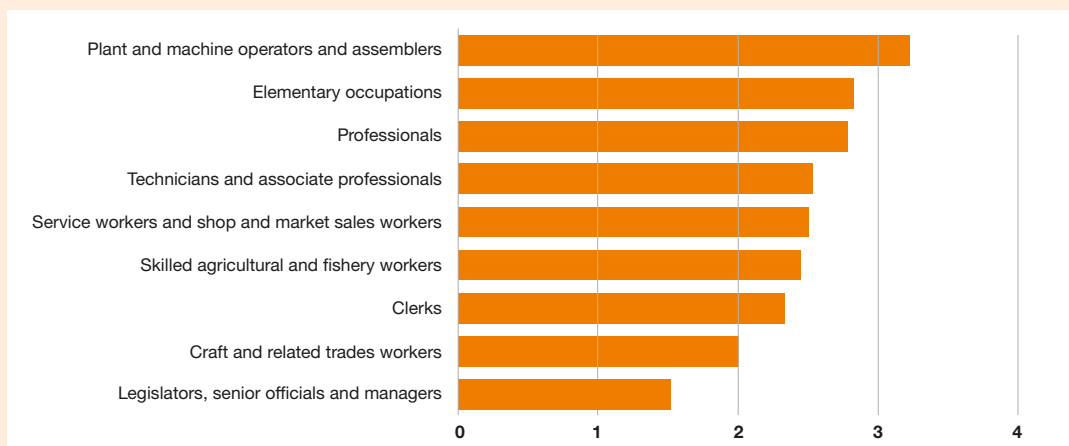
### ESI skills activation pillar in the Netherlands, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of seven years. The ideal performance is scaled to 100, with national scores computed and compared to that. Example: a score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65 % of the ideal performance, with 35 % (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: [Cedefop ESI](#).

### Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, the Netherlands



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (FIOD). A score of 4 indicates a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quartiles of the occupation (here for all EU-27).

Source: [Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#).



## Further information

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- Cedefop. (2024). *Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – Netherlands*. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies.
- Cedefop. (2025). *Skills forecast report: Netherlands*.
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[Cedefop Skills intelligence tool](#)

[Cedefop Skills forecast](#)

[Cedefop Skills OVATE](#)

[Cedefop European Skills Index](#)

[Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#)

This Spotlight was drafted by Cedefop's Skills intelligence and foresight team.

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