

# Worklife in the Netherlands



Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research TNO

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ISBN-10: 90-5986-210-4

ISBN-13: 978-90-5986-210-4

© 2006 TNO

*Publisher:*

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*Layout:*

Coek Design, Zaandam

*Printing:*

PlantijnCasparie, Almere

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1 Employment and productivity in the Netherlands</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Peter Smulders &amp; Seth van den Bossche</i>	
Summary	9
1.1 Introduction	10
1.2 Population and labour force	10
1.3 Labour participation in 2005	12
1.4 Trends in labour participation by sex	13
1.5 Trends in labour participation by age	13
1.6 Sectoral labour market changes	16
1.7 Labour productivity	20
1.8 Employees and the self-employed	21
1.9 Unemployment	21
1.10 Literature	23
<b>2 Essentials of labour law and social security legislation</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Jan Popma &amp; Jan Harmen Kwantes</i>	
Summary	25
2.1 Introduction	25
2.2 Working Conditions	27
2.3 Social Security Policy as a means to fight absenteeism	32
2.4 Working Time	34
2.5 Work and Care	38
2.6 Literature	40
<b>3 Trends and risk groups in working conditions</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>Seth van den Bossche, Peter Smulders &amp; Irene Houtman</i>	
Summary	43
3.1 Introduction	44
3.2 Information sources	44
3.3 Psychosocial risk factors	45
3.4 Workplace violence and discrimination	51
3.5 Physical risk factors	54
3.6 Ergonomic risk factors	57
3.7 Working hours	59
3.8 Emerging risks	61
3.9 Literature	64

<b>4</b>	<b>Work in the Netherlands and the EU compared</b>	<b>67</b>
	<i>Peter Smulders</i>	
	Summary	67
4.1	Introduction	67
4.2	Method	69
4.3	Results	72
4.4	Conclusion	78
4.5	Literature	80
<b>5</b>	<b>Gender and Age Differences in Work and Health</b>	<b>83</b>
	<i>Aukje Nauta</i>	
	Summary	83
5.1	Introduction	83
5.2	Gender and age differences in employment status and employability	86
5.3	Gender and age differences in working conditions and health risks at work	91
5.4	Gender and age differences in health, absenteeism and disability	96
5.5	Conclusions	99
	5.5.1 Gender differences	99
	5.5.2 Age differences	100
5.6	'Statistical discrimination'	100
5.7	Recommendations	102
5.8	Literature	105
<b>6</b>	<b>Working hours and overtime</b>	<b>107</b>
	<i>Anja Kremer</i>	
	Summary	107
6.1	Aim of this chapter	108
6.2	Relevance of the theme	108
6.3	Legislation	108
6.4	Trend in working time in the Netherlands and the 15 EU member countries	109
6.5	Data: the Netherlands Survey on Working Conditions 2003	111
6.6	Results: Contractual working hours	112
6.7	Overtime and hours worked in total	115
6.8	Working time across employment sectors	118
6.9	Working time across occupational job categories	122
6.10	Summary and discussion	123
6.11	Literature	123
<b>7</b>	<b>VDU-work and working at home and working from home</b>	<b>125</b>
	<i>Tinka van Vuuren, Peter Smulders &amp; Ton Korver</i>	
	Summary	125
7.1	Theme and hypotheses	125
7.2	Method	129
	7.2.1 Data	129
	7.2.2 Variables and analysis	129

7.3	Results	131
7.3.1	Working with a VDU or a computer	131
7.3.2	Working at home and working from home (telework)	134
7.4	Conclusions and discussion	137
7.5	Literature	138
<b>8</b>	<b>Health, chronic disease, absenteeism and work disability</b>	<b>141</b>
	<i>Irene Houtman</i>	
	Summary	141
8.1	Organizational, technological and demographic changes	141
8.2	Data	142
8.3	Results: self-reported health	143
8.3.1	Trends	143
8.3.2	Risk groups	145
8.3.3	The Netherlands compared with the EU	145
8.4	Occupational diseases	146
8.5	Trends in sickness absence	147
8.6	Work disability	150
8.7	Costs of absenteeism and work disability	152
8.8	Determinants of ill health, sickness absenteeism and disability	154
8.9	Measures to reduce long-term absenteeism and disability inflow due to psychosocial & musculoskeletal disorders	155
8.9.1	National level: reforms and policy programmes to reduce sickness absenteeism and disability	155
8.9.2	Covenants on Health and Safety at Work	157
8.9.3	Prevention at the level of the organisation or the individual	157
8.10	Conclusions	159
8.11	Literature	160
<b>9</b>	<b>Occupational accidents</b>	<b>165</b>
	<i>Jan Popma &amp; Anita Venema</i>	
	Summary	165
9.1	Introduction	165
9.2	Dutch regulations concerning occupational accidents	166
9.3	Accidents at work: facts and figures	167
9.3.1	Fatal accidents	167
9.3.2	Non-fatal accidents	168
9.4	Determinants of accidents at work	172
9.4.1	Primary mechanisms and causal factors	172
9.4.2	Flexible work	173
9.4.3	Work pressure	175
9.4.4	Fatigue	176
9.5	Safety policy	178
9.6	Literature	179

## Preface

The division Work and Employment of TNO Quality of Life – with 200 employees – is a national centre of knowledge on working life issues in the Netherlands. TNO as a whole – with 4000 staff members – is the largest independent research and consultancy organization in the Netherlands, receiving structural, however partial funding from the Dutch government for innovative research and development. In consultation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the division Work and Employment seeks to develop new approaches to work and organization. It supports the Dutch government as well as public organizations and the business community.

Its major fields of research are organizational issues, work pressure and stress, physical strain and repetitive strain injuries, absenteeism, work disability and rehabilitation, labour market issues and labour and health policies. The division Work and Employment is WHO Collaborating Centre Occupational Health and Dutch representative in the Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health (PEROSH) as well as in the European Association of National Productivity Centres (EANPC).

The OSH-research areas of other divisions of TNO (e.g. dangerous substances, work toxicology, noise, vibrations) are not central in this book.

This book reflects the major research areas of Work and Employment. Thus, it deals with relevant topics such as trends in work and health and with age, gender and business sectors as ‘risk groups’. It focuses on working hours and overtime, computer work and working at home. Of course, it describes the legislative labour and social security context and how the Netherlands relates to other European countries with respect to work and health. The book is strongly based on representative datasets developed in agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to monitor work and health in the Netherlands since the year 2000.

I am proud that this book has been published and congratulate the authors. I believe the book will provide the reader with a broad picture of the actual situation in important aspects of the work environment in the Netherlands. I hope it will stimulate international collaboration and the discussion on the future of work and health among government officials, social partners and professionals.

Dr Frank Pot  
*Director Research*  
*TNO Quality of Life*

# Chapter 1

## Employment and productivity in the Netherlands

*Peter Smulders & Seth van den Bossche*

### Summary

- With more than 16 million inhabitants, the Netherlands is one of the larger nations in Europe.
- About 47 percent of the Dutch population **of all ages** works 12 hours or more, with or without a social benefit or old age pension. Fifty-three percent of the population does not work 12 hours or more.
- Among the 16 million inhabitants in the Netherlands there are 13 million natives and 3 million migrants, which is 19 % of all inhabitants. Most migrants in the Netherlands are from Surinam, the Antilles, Turkey and Morocco.
- Male labour participation first grew from 64% in 1992 to 67 % in 2000 and 2001, but decreased to 62 % in 2005 (men aged 15 years and older working 12 hours or more a week). Female labour participation increased continually from 34% in 1992 to 44% in 2005.
- The increase in the labour participation of older persons is impressive. In the period 1993-2004 the participation of younger persons (15-24 years old) remained at the same level as in 1993 (about 40 %). In the 25-49 age group the participation increased from 70 to 79 percent. But in the 50-64 years age group the participation rose from 36 to 51 percent, which is generally considered to be quite spectacular.
- Compared to the EU, the Netherlands – together with Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, and the UK - is a typically service-oriented country. In the 25 EU-countries 28 percent of the employed persons aged 15 and older work in industry (in the Netherlands only 20 percent). In the EU-25 about 67 percent of the employed work in the market and non-market service sector (in the Netherlands this percentage is about 77 percent).
- The Netherlands is among the countries with the highest educational level in the EU-25. Almost 50 % of all workers are highly skilled non manual workers.
- The jobs created in the Netherlands during the past decades were to a large extent part-time jobs and flexible jobs.
- In 2004-2005 the Netherlands was, within Europe – together with the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and Austria - among the countries with the lowest unemployment rates.
- The trends in work and working conditions presented in this book should be interpreted against the background of these labour market changes.

## Chapter 2

# Essentials of labour law and social security legislation

*Jan Popma\* & Jan Harmen Kwantes*

### Summary

Over the last decade, Dutch labour law as well as social security legislation have been revised quite dramatically. One of the objectives was to reduce absenteeism and promote reintegration. As appears from empirical research, this legal reform has been rather successful in this respect. The second goal, to stimulate *prevention* of occupational accidents and work-related diseases, has somewhat shifted to the back seat. Still, recent findings indicate that the number of occupational accidents has been declining (see chapter 9). Also, the number of employees exposed to degrading working conditions or work-related risks is apparently past its peak.

A second feature of the Dutch system is that it seeks to strengthen self-regulation: the various legal acts set out a framework of ‘rules of play’ as well as minimum protection standards, and invite social partners to elaborate ‘tailor-made’ rulings within their own sector or company. It is clear that, despite the fact that quantitatively social partners have taken up the gage, in at least one respect the system is not without flaws. The Dutch system of (enforced) self-regulation relies heavily on worker participation, notably via works councils and workers’ representatives in smaller companies. Empirical findings demonstrate that this clearly overstretches the powers of the representatives. They are often lacking in resources, notably time and expertise, and it may also be surmised that industrial relations are not perfectly harmonious in all companies. In companies where the workers’ representatives are surpassed by the employer, this may lead to the undermining of fundamental human rights. Also, self-regulation without the proper involvement of all parties may be at loggerheads with fundamentals such as legitimacy and legislative quality (is the latter being one of the objectives of the Deregulation policies of the Dutch government).

## Chapter 3

# Trends and risk groups in working conditions

*Seth van den Bossche, Peter Smulders & Irene Houtman*

### Summary

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the developments of working conditions in the Netherlands throughout the last decade. The main conclusions that can be drawn from nationwide surveys data are the following.

After increasing for about 20 years, *job demands* stabilised at the end of the 1990s. Recent figures even showed a downward trend. In 2005 work pressure was highest in education and in banking & finances, and lowest in agriculture

Workers increasingly report more *job control*, which may probably be explained by labour market changes, i.c. more service and less industrial work. The lowest levels of job control are found among the 15-24 years old, workers in agriculture, transport & communication and hotels & restaurants. Workers in the public administration have the highest level of job control.

Trends on *emotional demands* are not yet available. This work characteristic is highest in health care, education and the public administration, and will have everything to do with the intensive contacts with clients in those sectors.

The tendency of increased *workplace violence* that was observed from 2000 until 2003, seems to stabilise in 2004. Sectors such as health care, hotels and restaurants, and education, where work involves frequent customer contact, are more vulnerable to intimidation by customers than other sectors.

Exposure to *physical risks* at work does not appear to decrease, despite the fact that employers have been taking more measures. Dangerous work is highest in the construction sector, followed by agriculture, industry, transport & communication. The differences between males and females with respect to dangerous work is striking. Highest levels of noise are found in construction, industry and agriculture. Work that involves repetitive movements of arms and hands has become more common over the last years, probably because of the continuing introduction of VDU- or computer work.

The number of contractual *working hours* has decreased slightly from about 33 hours per week in 2000 to 32 hours in 2004. Working on Saturday morning increased from 12 % in 2000 to 21 % in 2004. Working on Saturday afternoon increased from 10 % in 2000 to 17 % in 2004. Nowadays about 9-10 % of the employees work on Sunday morning and on Sunday afternoon.

## Chapter 4

# Work in the Netherlands and the EU compared

*Peter Smulders*

### Summary

The Third European Work Environment Survey data has been analysed in an effort to find the differences between the fifteen old EU member states and the twelve acceding and candidate countries as regards their work environment. The analysis focuses on sixteen work indicators pertaining to industry, organizational size, work environment, working hours and work-related health issues. A cluster analysis shows that the twenty-seven countries can be combined into five clusters: northwest Europe, central Europe with Italy and Portugal, Greece and Spain as a couple, and Cyprus and Romania as two one-country clusters.

The main results of the analysis are: (1) Complex, computerized and autonomous work as well as repetitive work are mainly found in the richer western and northern European countries. (2) Work pressure is also highest in these countries, though Cyprus and Malta score very high on work pressure too. (3) Long working hours, non-standard working hours, heavy work and job hazards are mainly found in the new central and southern European countries and in Greece and Spain. (4) Work-related stress and fatigue and work-related musculo-skeletal pains are somewhat more common in the central and southern countries, but Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and France score high on them as well. The north-south hypothesis pertaining to the work environment (more challenging jobs and fewer job hazards and work-related health problems in the north) is only partly confirmed.

# Chapter 5

## Gender and Age Differences in Work and Health

*Aukje Nauta*

### Summary

This chapter deals with the gender and age differences in work and health in the Netherlands. We present recent Dutch data in relation to three subjects: (1) employment status and employability, (2) working conditions and health risks at work, and (3) health and absenteeism.

Survey data shows that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the position of women and older employees at work in the Netherlands lags behind the position of men and middle-aged employees. Women participate less or work fewer hours in paid work, have less challenging jobs and are absent more often from work, compared to men. Older employees show less mobility, suffer more frequently from chronic diseases and are absent more often from work, compared to middle-aged employees.

This knowledge is helpful in the development of policies aimed at achieving a more equal and just distribution of interesting and healthy work among men and women irrespective of age. However, the knowledge is not without drawbacks. It is clear, for example, that the elderly are less healthy than the young and that women spend more time doing household tasks than men which leaves them less time to pursue a career. Thus, employers may use the figures to exclude female and older people from attractive job opportunities. This is called 'statistical discrimination'. We will argue, however, that this type of discrimination is not a clever strategy for employers to use, because an individual curriculum vitae says so much more about a person's employability than merely his or her age and gender. We therefore promote an individual approach when trying to improve the balance between work demands and individual competences. We describe how this approach can contain three types of interventions: (1) combatting stereotypes concerning female and older employees; (2) adjusting work and working conditions to the capabilities of all employees, including women and older persons (design for all); and (3) improving the employability of all employees, including women and older members of staff (diversity management).

## Chapter 6

# Working hours and overtime

*Anja Kremer*

### Summary

This chapter describes the working week of Dutch employees (the contractual working hours, overtime hours and hours worked in total). For this, we used data from the First Netherlands Survey on Working Conditions, conducted in 2003 among 10,075 employees.

Results confirm the generally known pattern in the Netherlands that the majority of women contractually work part-time (71% work less than 36 hours) with a mean number of hours of 26.5, while the majority of men work full-time (84%) with a mean number of hours of 36.6. This gender difference is present in all age categories, education levels, family situations and types of employment contract. The mean number of hours contractually worked by all workers is 32.3 hours per week.

Data supports the Dutch characteristic that after having children, many women stop working and that those who continue working, work fewer hours.

Irrespective of the contractual working week, at least two thirds of the employees work overtime (paid and unpaid together), both men and women. The mean number of overtime hours for all employees is 3.7. This is 4.6 hours for men and 2.5 for women.

As a result, the average employee works 36.1 hours in total, overtime included. For men this is 41.2 hours and for women 29.0. Three percent of the women and 13% of the men work more than 48 hours in total, which is more than was legally allowed in the Netherlands in 2003.

With respect to weekly hours worked in total, large differences exist across employment sectors and occupational job categories. Employment sectors where employees most frequently have full-time jobs (with a contractual working week of at least 36 hours) are: manufacturing, construction, sale & repair of motor vehicles, road transport, computer and related activities, and electricity, gas and water supply. Employment sectors where half of the employees or more contractually work part-time (less than 36 hours), are: department stores & supermarkets, education, health care & social work, other services, and hotels and restaurants.

Overtime is most common in the road transport, the oil & chemical industry, primary education, agriculture, and in hotels and restaurants. In the road transport sector the average employee works 48 hours a week. The data reveals that 47% of the employees working in this sector work more than 48 hours in total. Thus, almost half of the employees working in the road transport sector work more hours than was allowed by the Dutch working hour regulations in 2003.

# Chapter 7

## VDU-work and working at home and working from home

*Tinka van Vuuren, Peter Smulders & Ton Korver\**

### Summary

This chapter deals with the spread of working at home, teleworking and working with a computer, and their impact on the quality of work in the Netherlands. Almost two out of every three Dutch employees perform their work from behind a Visual Display Unit (VDU). In the vanguard of computer users we find administrative, commercial, managerial and professional workers.

The pattern of workers at home, without a computer, matches the pattern of VDU-workers, with the important exception of the clerical and administrative workers. In terms of health and satisfaction they resemble their teleworking colleagues. The latter, however, are significantly more satisfied with their job than those who do not work from home. For the risk of RSI working at or from home is not discriminating: age and sex are the strong predictors here. Computer-related work is, therefore, a mixed blessing. If used moderately it enriches work, if used for long stretches of time it is a risk for the occurrence of RSI. At the same time, the employees concerned are not less satisfied with their work and in the case of telework they are actually more satisfied.

# Chapter 8

## Health, chronic disease, absenteeism and work disability

*Irene Houtman*

### Summary

In this chapter changes in health of workers, sickness absenteeism and work disability from the beginning of the nineties until recently will be presented. Also the costs involved and opportunities for prevention will be dealt with.

Survey and register data show that employee health and burnout are stable. Repetitive strain injuries (RSI), however, increased. After a rise during the eighties and nineties, both absenteeism and disability inflow have been decreasing. More financial incentives in the social security system and the poor economic situation were probably contributing factors to this trend.

For more than a decade musculoskeletal and mental health disorders have been the main reasons for the long-term absence and for the inflow into the disability system. A recently extended and updated model on the societal costs of working conditions shows that the majority of the costs were related to long-term drop-out from work, resulting in disability claims. Again, two diagnoses are responsible for 83% of the cost of work-related drop-out: musculoskeletal (43%) and mental health disorders (40%). The total cost of work-related illness and prevention is estimated to be 12.7 billion euros, which is equivalent to almost 3% of the GNP.

The prevention of drop-out from work due to work-related illness is receiving a lot of attention from actors at the national, sectoral, organisational and professional level.

# Chapter 9

## Occupational accidents

*Jan Popma\* & Anita Venema*

### Summary

This chapter deals with occupational accidents in the Netherlands. Paragraph 9.2 briefly describes the statutory regulations surrounding accidents at work in the Netherlands. This includes the obligation to keep a serious accident register together with a risk assessment report. Paragraph 9.3 draws a statistical picture of the number and relative severity of occupational accidents in the Netherlands and depicts some of the effects they entail. The paragraph contains data on fatal accidents, accidents resulting in hospital admission and accidents resulting in absence from work. All indicators show a declining trend between 2000 and 2004. In paragraph 9.4, we endeavour to elucidate on some of the backgrounds that may have an effect on the number of accidents at work. This includes data on primary mechanisms and causal factors, but also the relation between flexible work, work pressure, fatigue and occupational accidents is explored. In paragraph 9.5, finally, we turn to both government policy and company measures to reduce the number of accidents. Safety culture and risk awareness are two elements in the “Strengthening Occupational Safety” program that the Dutch government has launched to improve occupational safety.