



Press release

Statistics Netherlands

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Sick leave up

Figures just released by Statistics Netherlands show that more people reported in sick last year than the year before. This is the first time sick leave has risen since 1993. In 1998 the sick leave rate was 5.6%, up from 5.1% in 1997; this means that every day one in eighteen people stayed home from work because of illness or injury.

Sick leave rates fell from 1993 to 1997, partly because of changes in legislation, which placed the responsibility for reducing sick leave increasingly with employers. In 1993 6.7% of employees stayed home sick. In 1994 legislation was introduced to reduce sick leave, obliging employers themselves to pay the first two or six weeks wages of sick employees, depending on the size of the company. Many companies responded by taking measures to reduce sick leave and partly as a consequence of these, sick leave dropped sharply to 5.5%, and retained this level in 1995. In 1996 another law was introduced, this time obliging employers to pay wages of sick employees not only for two or six weeks, but for a whole year. Employers could insure themselves against this risk with private insurance companies. Again this resulted in a fall in sick leave rates to 5.1% in 1996. This remained unchanged in 1997, but with the rise to 5.6% in 1998 sick leave is back at the level of 1995, although still substantially lower than in 1993.

Differences between industry branches

There are large differences in sick leave between the sectors of industry. The health care and welfare sector has the highest rate with 8.7%, while agriculture, trade, hotels and restaurants, and mineral extraction all have rates of below 4%. There is a strong correlation between size of company and sick leave. Large companies (one hundred or more employees) have more sick employees than small and medium-sized ones. As sick leave rates rose more strongly for large than for small and medium-sized companies, the differences between large and small companies increased even further last year.

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