



Press release

Statistics Netherlands

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Employment increases by 200 thousand in 1999

1999 was another good year for the labour market. Employment grew by 200 thousand for the third year in succession. Unemployment fell sharply to its lowest level since 1980, and for the first time in history, more than half of Dutch women have a paid job. After years of increase, the number of flexible workers is now showing a slight fall. The participation of older people in the labour force also continued to increase in 1999, according to Statistics Netherlands' labour force survey.

Many more people in work

According to the labour force survey the number of people with a job of at least twelve hours a week in 1999 was on average 196 thousand higher than in 1998. This is confirmed by the results of the employment surveys in the first three quarters of the year. In 1997 and 1998 too, the increase in employment was around 200 thousand. In the last three years the number of women with a job has risen by 370 thousand; the increase among men has been considerably smaller, at 250 thousand. The total number of people with a job of at least twelve hours a week, the active labour force, was an average 6.8 million in 1999.

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Women break through the 50% participation barrier

Women's participation in the labour force rose further in 1999. For the first time in history over half (51%) of Dutch women aged 15-64 had a paid job of at least twelve hours a week. In 1989 this was still only 37%. The increase has been quite spectacular: fourteen percent in the space of ten years. Female participation was highest among 25-29 year-olds. In 1999 three-quarters of women in this age bracket had a job. Ten years earlier, participation rates were highest for 20-24 year-old

women. Six out of ten women in this age group were working then. The shift of the peak participation rates to the 25-29 age group is caused by women having children at older ages, but also by fewer mothers giving up their jobs when they have their children.

Participation of older people continues to rise

The participation of older people in the labour force increased further in 1999. In the first half of the nineties, 38% of people aged 55-59 had paid employment, and from 1995 the participation of this age group grew to 47% in 1999, for both men and women. For 60-64 year-olds, the increase in participation has stagnated somewhat: last year 14% of them had a job, about the same proportion as at the end of the eighties and only slightly more than the eleven per cent in the mid-nineties. The most remarkable increase was for the age group 50-54 years. In the last ten years labour participation for this group has risen from 52 to 66%, and for women the increase was much larger (18%) than for men (10%).

Flexible contracts on their way out

From 1994 the number of flexible workers - i.e. workers with a contract for less than one year, or with a flexible number of weekly hours, and standby/replacement workers - increased continuously. Its growth rate was higher than that for total employment. This came to a stop last year. The sample-based results of the labour force survey even show a fall, by just over 30 thousand to 571 thousand. This drop is connected with the increasing demand for labour. However, the number of flexible workers is still much higher than at the beginning of the nineties, when 400 thousand people had a flexible contract.

Non-active labour force drops below 300 thousand

Statistics Netherlands compiles a number of unemployment rates. To analyse the situation on the labour market, figures on the non-active part of the labour force are the most relevant. The non-active labour force consists of people who are actively seeking work of at least twelve hours a week and can start immediately, regardless of whether they are registered with an employment agency. The non-active labour force fell by 56 thousand to just under 300

thousand people last year. This is the equivalent of 4.1% of the labour force. Female unemployment is twice as high as male unemployment, as it has been for years now. The sharp drop in the non-active labour force has brought unemployment down to its lowest rate since 1980.

Figures on registered unemployment are published monthly. Two weeks ago Statistics Netherlands published the annual figures for 1999. As these figures include only those people who are registered with an employment agency, the figures were lower than those for the non-active labour force. Registered unemployment was 221 thousand on average last year.

Potential labour reserve one hundred thousand lower

A broader definition of unemployment is one that includes everyone who would like a paid job of at least twelve hours a week, regardless of whether they are actively looking for one or could start work immediately. This can be considered as the total potential labour reserve. In 1999 this comprised an average 805 thousand people, just over 100 thousand fewer than in 1998.

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