



Press release

Statistics Netherlands

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Sick leave increases further

The number of days employees were absent from work due to sickness or injury increased further in the private sector in 1999, according to figures from Statistics Netherlands. Sick leave was 6.0%, compared with 5.6% in 1998, when it had risen for the first time since 1993. The highest proportion of employees reporting in sick was in the health and welfare sector. Sick leave is more extensive in large companies than in smaller ones.

Sick leave up for second year running

Last year, sick leave in the private sector was 6.0%. This is the equivalent of one person in 17 reporting in sick every day. The rate was 0.4 of a percent point higher than in 1998. This is the second year in succession that absence due to sickness rose.

In 1993 sick leave was 6.7%. In 1993 a number of legal measures were introduced to reduce sick leave, incorporating the obligation for employers instead of the state to pay the wages of sick employees for the first two or six weeks of absence, depending on the size of the company. This pushed back sick leave sharply to 5.5% in 1994, a level it retained in 1995. With the further privatisation of provisions under the health law in 1996, under which employers are obliged to pay the wages of sick employees for the first twelve months of their absence, sick leave fell further to 5.1% in that year and the following year. In 1998, however, it was back up to 5.6%, the pre-privatisation level, and in 1999 it climbed further to 6.0%, although it is still lower than in 1993.

Differences between sectors of industry

There are large differences between rates of sick leave between the various sectors of industry. The highest proportion of employees reporting in sick, 9%, was in the health and welfare sector, while rates

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of less than 4% were reported in agriculture and the catering sector.

There is a strong correlation between company size and sick leave. People who work for companies with one hundred employees or more are more likely to stay at home because of ill health than people employed by small and medium-sized companies. Large companies had a sick leave rate of 7.8% in 1999 and are back at the 1993 level, while smaller companies have managed to keep their level of absence down at the lower level of 1993.

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