

Working Conditions in the Netherlands 2022-2023

Monitoring compliance with the Dutch Working Conditions Act, exposure to work-related risks, measures taken to counteract risks, and healthy and safe work practices

Netherlands Labour Authority, September 2024

1. About Working Conditions in the Netherlands 2022-2023

From 1999 onwards¹, the Netherlands Labour Authority monitors 1) companies' degree of compliance with the Dutch Working Conditions Act²; 2) employee exposure to work-related risks; 3) measures taken to counteract these risks; and 4) healthy and safe work practices. This information is being used to make informed decisions about future inspection priorities and to inform policy makers about the effectiveness of working condition laws and regulations.

In 2022-2023, inspectors visited 1.693 companies widely ranging in size and across types of business sector. All data has been statistically weighted towards the population of companies (±350.000) and employees (±8.5 mln.) in the Netherlands.³

Unique about this longitudinal cross-sectional monitor is that it (1) is based on the informed, professional judgement of labour inspectors instead of self-reports; and (2) is based on a random sample of companies.

¹ For earlier publications on monitoring results, also see (only available in Dutch): [Arbo in Bedrijf 2016 | Rapport | Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie \(nlarbeidsinspectie.nl\)](#), [Arbo in bedrijf 2018 | Rapport | Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie \(nlarbeidsinspectie.nl\)](#), [Arbo in bedrijf 2019-2021 | Rapport | Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie \(nlarbeidsinspectie.nl\)](#)

² The Dutch Working Conditions Act stipulates obligations for both employers and, to a less extent, employees. In general, all employers with at least one employee are required to provide healthy and safe working conditions. These obligations, amongst others, include a Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E), a contract with an occupational health and safety service provider, and providing training and education to their employees about healthy and safe work practices.

³ The populations mentioned in this report can deviate from other general statistics, as some sectors and companies without employees are excluded from monitoring as they do not have to be overseen as part of the Working Conditions Act.

1. ***Informed, professional judgement of labour inspectors:*** In contrast to other research projects in this field, data in this study is not based on self-reports by employees or employers, but based on the informed judgement of professional labour inspectors.⁴ Inspectors are well aware of current laws and regulations concerning healthy and safe work, and have a trained eye for identifying (potential) risks in the workplace. Labour inspectors provide data using a structured online questionnaire after a review of the company's policy documents, a site visit, and an individual interview with both the employer and an employee.
2. ***Random sample:*** For reasons of efficiency, the Labour Authority usually targets specific sectors and companies for inspections based on risk-assessments and complaints about unhealthy or unsafe working conditions. Instead, for this research, companies are selected from a random sample of all companies in the Netherlands that employ at least one employee. Consequently, valid conclusions can be drawn about the current state of affairs concerning healthy and safe working conditions across all types of companies.

2. Summary – Most important results for 2022-2023

Below, we discuss the most important research findings for 2022-2023.

1. ***An increase in the number of companies with a Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E) in the Netherlands. In 2022-2023, 64% of all companies had a RI&E compared to approximately 50% of all companies between 2014-2021. In about one third of companies, the quality of the RI&E is judged as insufficient.***

Dutch law considers the RI&E as the starting point for ensuring healthy and safe working conditions. Employers are obliged to have an RI&E in which they list relevant work-related health and safety risks and describe measures to counteract these risks. In 2022-2023, 64% of all companies had a RI&E. This is an increase compared to previous years, in which approximately 50% of all companies had a RI&E. Similar to earlier years, small companies are less likely to have an RI&E compared to large companies. Of all employees in the Netherlands, 88% of employees work for a company that has a RI&E.

In 35% of companies with a RI&E, this mandatory policy document is assessed to be of insufficient quality based on criteria such as completeness, timeliness, and adequateness. Concerning completeness of the RI&E, 55% of the investigated health and safety risks that are present in the workplace are identified by employers in the RI&E.

As part of the RI&E, companies need to have a written plan of action. In this obligatory document, companies have to state which measures they take to either prevent risks from occurring or reduce the impact of these risks. In 2022-2023, 62% of all companies had a plan of action compared to 47% in 2019-2021.

⁴ Using self-report data is common in research on working conditions among representative samples of employees or employers, such as the National Survey on working conditions for employers and employees by TNO.

2. A decrease in the number of companies that provide information and education on, and supervise healthy and safe working conditions. Compliance with other obligations of the Working Conditions Act has remained at similar levels.

Employers are obliged to inform their employees about relevant health and safety risks and the measures taken to counteract these risks. Moreover, they need to ascertain that employees comply with all health and safety instructions. Furthermore, companies are required to appoint a designated health and safety officer (*preventiemedewerker* in Dutch) and a company emergency response officer (*bedrijfshulpverlener* in Dutch). Lastly, employers are obliged to have a contract with an occupational health and safety service provider.

Whereas in 2019-2021, 73% of all companies provided information and education to employees and supervised healthy and safe work, in 2022-2023 this percentage has dropped to 62%. Rates of having a health and safety officer (67% of the companies), a company emergency response officer (70% of companies) and a contract with an occupational health and safety service provider (80% of companies) have remained similar to 2019-2021.

3. Contracts with an occupational health and safety service provider are more complete compared to 2019-2021, but the actual use of mandatory services and working arrangements lags behind the agreed services.

The obligatory contract with an occupational health and safety service provider should include various mandatory services, such as support for absenteeism and prevention. Various other arrangements must also be included in the contract, including consultation between a company doctor and employee representatives and unobstructed access for the company doctor to the workplace.

In 2022-2023, 80% of all companies have a contract with an occupational health and safety service provider. In total, 96% of all employees in the Netherlands work for a company with such a contract. With the exception of sickness absence management which was already high in 2019-2021, the presence of all mandatory services and other arrangements in the contract with the occupational health and safety service provider has increased in 2022-2023.

Of the mandatory services in the contract, sickness absence management (in 95% of all contracts) is most often included, while advise on the RI&E (63%) and the periodic occupational health check (*periodiek gezondheidsonderzoek* in Dutch; 68%) are less often included. Of the working arrangements, the procedure for a second opinion with the company doctor (69% of all contracts) is most often included, while consultation between the company doctor and employee representatives (54%) is included least often in the contract.

In practice, companies use few preventive services and working arrangements. The results imply that the anticipated preventive effects of the contract (e.g. from the periodic occupational health check) are not optimal.

4. ***The most harmful health and safety risks are psychosocial workload, physical strain, hazardous substances, working at heights, machine safety and collision hazards.⁵⁶ The impact of a risk is determined, among other things, by (1) how often a risk occurs (2) how well a risk is managed and (3) the impact of the consequences of a risk. How often a risk occurs and how well a risk is managed by the employer is topic of study in this monitoring research.***

The most common health and safety risks in the Netherlands are (computer)screen work, machine safety, dynamic (physical) strain, hazardous substances, and adverse or static posture.

The risks of hazardous substances, collision, vibrations and explosion hazards (ATEX) are relatively less often adequately controlled, which means that the employer does not take any or insufficient measures to counteract the risk.

In 2022-2023, the most common health and safety risks in the Netherlands are (computer)screen work (present in 45% of companies), machine safety (39%), dynamic (physical) strain (34%), hazardous substances (33%) and adverse or static body posture (33%). Compared to 2019-2021, the risks adverse or static posture, working at height and working in confined spaces are more common within companies in 2022-2023. However, the risks of loud noise and vibration are less common in 2022-2023 compared to the previous measurement.

The risk of working with hazardous substances is least often adequately controlled by companies; 46% of companies where employees work with hazardous substances take no or insufficient measures to reduce this risk. At the same time, working with hazardous substances is one of the most common risks within companies. The risks of collision, vibration and explosion hazards (ATEX) are also relatively less often adequately controlled.

The percentages of companies that do not adequately control working at height, loud noise, vibrations or machine safety has increased compared to 2019-2021. Machine safety is therefore one of the most common risks, as well as one of the risks for which an increase in inadequate control has been observed. In the case of the risk of working at height, both an increase in the presence of the risk and in the percentage of companies that do not adequately control this risk is observed.

The number of employees in the Netherlands exposed to health and safety risks without adequate control of the risk is highest for sedentary behaviour/sitting for long periods of time (315,000 employees), collision hazards (289,000 employees), and (computer)screen work (250,000 employees).

⁵ Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie (2023). De staat van gezond werk.

<https://www.nlarbeidsinspectie.nl/publicaties/rapporten/2023/05/10/staat-van-gezond-werk>

⁶ Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie (2023). Monitor Arbeidsongevallen 2022.

<https://www.nlarbeidsinspectie.nl/publicaties/rapporten/2023/10/05/monitor-arbeidsongevallen-2022>

5. *Psychosocial workload (work pressure, internal and external undesirable behaviour, and discrimination) occur at approximately 1 in 5 companies in the Netherlands and are not always adequately controlled.*

Psychosocial workload concerns all factors that induce stress at work, including work pressure, internal and external undesirable behavior and discrimination. The risk of psychosocial workload is present in all companies in the Netherlands that employ two or more people, but that does not mean that psychosocial workload always occurs. In 2022-2023, employees working in at least 31% of Dutch companies had to deal more than occasionally with stress due to work pressure. In at least 26% of all companies employees have experienced external undesirable behavior and at 12% of the companies employees experienced internal undesirable behavior. Discrimination has occurred in at least 9% of all companies.

For these four risks, more than one third of all companies have taken no or insufficient measures to counteract these risks. This is the highest for the risk of discrimination, where half of the companies have not taken adequate measures. The number of employees in the Netherlands who are faced with these psychosocial risks varies between 412,000 (external undesirable behavior) and 635,000 (work pressure).

6. *Companies that have drawn up a good-quality RI&E perform better in terms of providing a healthy and safe working place compared to companies that have no RI&E or an RI&E of insufficient quality.*

This study also investigated the relationship between the extent to which employers comply with the system obligations of the Working Conditions Act and the extent to which employees work in a healthy and safe environment. These analyses provide more insight into the extent to which compliance with obligations in the Working Conditions Act, such as having an RI&E, is related to health and safety at work.

The results reveal that having an RI&E is positively related to healthy and safe work (operationalized as the proportion of adequately controlled risks as well as the presence of a proper safety culture within a company). Moreover, companies that have an RI&E of good quality perform better when it comes to healthy and safe working conditions in practice compared to companies that have no RI&E or an RI&E of insufficient quality.

In addition, having a health and safety officer, providing information and education and supervising a healthy and safe workplace are also positively related to adequately controlled risks and the presence of a safety culture within the company. Companies that comply with these obligations perform better when it comes to healthy and safe working conditions in practice compared to companies that have not appointed a health and safety officer and do not provide information and supervise. Please note that these are not causal relationships because of the use of cross-sectional data, so no inferences can be drawn in terms of cause and effect.

- 7. In 80% of the companies, the overall working conditions are considered sufficient or good. The main underlying motive for non-compliance is a lack of knowledge concerning laws and regulations.**

Labour inspectors assessed the overall working conditions as sufficient or good in 80% of the companies. The remaining 20% of the companies are categorized based on their motives for non-compliance as unwilling to comply, unable to comply, or unaware about their violations. Of the companies in which working conditions are deemed to be insufficient, 9% of non-compliers are characterized as not willing—i.e. employers who deliberately do not comply with the laws and regulations. The proportion of non-compliers that is unable to comply—i.e., being knowledgeable about the rules and want to comply but are unable to do so due to a lack of resources or opportunities—has been estimated at 15%. Most often, non-compliers are characterized as being unaware of rules and regulations they violate because of insufficient knowledge about these rules and regulations (76%).