



Industrial relations and social dialogue
**The Netherlands: Developments
in working life 2022**

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Introduction

The Netherlands started 2022 in a COVID-19 lockdown. In the first months of the year, the measures to reduce the further spread of the virus were phased out. Eventually, in March 2022, most restrictions were removed (Rijksoverheid, 2022g). Although policy-wise this might be the end of COVID-19 in the Netherlands, the virus remained present under the population (CBS, 2022a).

Despite economic growth, the Dutch economy struggled with a number of new challenges. The business and public sector were also still coping with the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had quite some impact, like in other EU countries. The energy prices, which were already increasing in 2021, showed a more substantial increase. In 2021, around 17% of the total consumed gas originated from Russia and in combination with the relatively high level of gas usage by Dutch households and businesses, the country had to deal with substantial increases of gas prices on the international markets. (CBS, 2022m). In June, the government announced the energy crisis (Rijksoverheid, 2022i).

There was an influx of Ukrainian refugees. In December 2022, approximately 86,000 Ukrainian refugees were registered (Rijksoverheid, 2022a). This influx, in combination with the increase of migrants from other countries, put quite some pressure on the possibilities and facilities to provide shelter on the short- and longer term and to handle migrant procedures.

Just like last year, the country deals with severe labour market shortages, due to a lack of personnel with skills needed (care sector, craft, etc.), flex workers that moved to other sectors in during COVID-19 (accommodation & food services sector), relatively high illness rates among personnel, among others due to COVID-19, etc. This led to an increase of wages offered to new personnel and a high volatility of personnel in and across sectors (SER, 2022b).

Another large problem was the carbon crisis. Emission rates are relatively very high, and actions were already taken in previous years to mitigate emissions. However, this turned out to be insufficient and in 2022 the European Commission (EC) did not accept further delays in reaching the reduction agreements. This meant, among other things, that plans must be developed to buy out farmers and that the business sector (in particular manufacturing, chemical industry and construction), has to invest to reduce emissions of nitrogen. These developments led to demonstrations and revolt by farmers, including movements of anti-governmentalism which protest general government policy, a further increase in housing shortage and more. The cabinet started with the development of the Energy Agenda: a government strategy aimed at cutting carbon emissions by 2050. Next, the country has to deal with impact of climate changes and the stimulation of the energy transition and improving the sustainability of housing and the business sector.

Overall, the country was and is still facing a number of severe crises, accompanied by high levels of inflation, slowly increasing interest rates and higher production and labour costs.

Political context

On 10 January 2022 cabinet Rutte IV was sworn in after the longest formation in Dutch history: 9 months after elections and a year after the resignation of cabinet Rutte III. The cabinet consists of the same parties as Rutte III: VVD (centre right), D66 (liberal democrats), CDA (centrist Christian party) and CU (more conservative centrist Christian party). Other combinations of parties led by the largest parties (VVD) showed to be not feasible, which made negotiations hard and complicated. In addition, the protracted negotiations led to the postponement of many important decisions related to for example climate change, the housing market and mobility in 2021. This meant that the coalition agreement had to include a large variety of policy plans on difficult topics. Overall, the negotiations led to an increase of government expenses on climate, education, social security, and defence (CPB, 2022). The cabinet has a very small majority in the House of Representatives and no majority in the Senate, which means that agreements have to be made with other parties to get policies approved. Given that there are 16 parties represented in the House of Representatives and 13 in the Senate, these sessions can be time consuming and complicated.

In March 2022, the municipal elections were held, which had the lowest turnout ever with 51%. These elections ended in favour of local parties, they gain 36% of all seats, which is 700 seats more than in the previous municipal elections (NOS, 2022c).

As described, one of the large problems the country has to deal with is the carbon crisis. The plans (in particular the buyout of farmers) led to demonstrations and revolt by farmers including movements of anti-governmentalisms, protesting general government policy. This and the inability of the country to provide short term shelter for refugees were factors that impacted the confidence in the new government. Social unrest related to inflation and decrease of purchasing power was limited. A broad and varied support system (allowance of electricity for each household, information campaigns, debt counselling etc.) was set up by governments of all levels (local, regional and national), the business sector and the people. The financial health of employees became an important topic at policy level, but also at business level.

Actors, institutions and processes

Social partners

Traditionally, the average level of social dialogue in the Netherlands is generally high. There are standard meetings and consultation systems in place which bring together peak-level, cross-sectoral employer organisations, cross sectoral trade unions, with the Ministries of Social Affairs and Employment and for Economic Affairs and Climate. The major Dutch umbrella organisations of all employers are the VNO-NCW Association of Dutch Enterprises and the Dutch Christian Employers' Union and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Netherlands (MKB Nederland). The major umbrella trade unions are the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, FNV), and the Christian Dutch Trade Unions (Christelijke Nederlandse Vakbeweging, CNV). These partners and ministries often discuss and negotiate cross-sectoral and sectoral policy changes which relate to working life and working conditions. In 2022, no major developments have taken place.

Social dialogue bodies or frameworks

In 2022 there were no changes in the social dialogue framework, or the bodies involved in this process or in the regulatory or legislative process.

Other working life related institutions

In 2022, there were no major changes in the structure or tasks of other work life related institutions.

Governmental responses to inflation

The very high inflation rates in 2022, had a severe impact on the purchasing power of a major part of the population. One of the major causes of the inflation was the rise in energy prices which has a direct impact on the energy paid by households and an impact on food production. A variety of measures are taken or agreed upon in 2022, which will come into place on 1 January 2023.

In 2022, the VAT on gas, electricity and district heating and excise duties on benzine and diesel were temporary decreased.

Low-income households could apply for a one-time energy allowance of €1,300 from municipalities.ⁱ This allowance will also become available in 2023. In addition, all Dutch households were granted a return of €190 on their monthly electricity bills in November and in December.

In September a purchasing power support package 2023 was approved of almost €16 billion. Examples of measures included are an increase of benefits such as the healthcare benefit, the child benefit and the rent benefit. The increase of the minimum wage with 10.15%. will lead to an increase of the state pension and welfare allowance with the same amount. The reduction of excise duties on benzine and diesel will continue till 1 July 2023. Income tax will decrease, and the student allowance will increase. The plan also includes negative impacts for certain groups: the self-employed allowance (*Zelfstandigenaftrek*) will be reduced further and some taxes such as the wealth tax and corporation tax will increase.

In October 2023, the Cabinet presented the price cap on electricity and gas of small consumers. From 1 January to 31 December 2023, the plan will be implemented which sets a temporary maximum price to gas and electricity at average energy consumption of small consumers. When exceeding the utility cap, the market prices will be charged. The difference between the market price and the price cap will be paid by the government. Small consumers include households, self-employed people, small businesses and associations.

To compensate part of the energy costs of SMEs whose energy costs are more than 7% of their turnover, the government introduced the temporary Energy Cost Contribution Scheme (TEK).ⁱⁱ Furthermore, there is a new window opened under the Credit guarantee for SMEs – *BMBK Green for sustainability*, which is a government loan guarantee scheme that stimulates SMEs to make their companies more sustainable.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2016, the government presented the Energy Agenda: a government strategy aimed at cutting carbon emission by 2050. The agenda covers policies for all sectors of the economy aimed at supporting a gradual reduction in carbon emissions of 80-95% by 2050. These policies will consist of a mixture of incentives and regulatory standards and obligations grouped into so-called 'transition paths'. In the Energy Agenda, these transition paths are drawn for the four functionalities (power and light, high temperature heat, low temperature heat and transport) on a general basis. Based on these guidelines, the government has started a consultation process with citizens, business, research institutions, civil society organisations and local authorities.^{iv}

The business sector plays an important role in achieving a low-carbon energy supply. Incentives to businesses to invest in sustainable energy include a renewable Energy Grant Scheme for large energy projects using geothermal heat and solar parks, and for smart technologies that combine production and storage or contribute to smart grids. In addition, an Investment Tax Credit for a range of energy-

efficient, environmentally friendly technologies will be developed, and sustainable energy investment grants (ISDE) for heat pumps, solar water heating systems, biomass boilers and pellet stoves are expected to come available

ⁱ Eurofound (2022), [Extra energy allowance for lower incomes](#), case NL-2022-1/2236 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

ⁱⁱ Eurofound (2022), [Energy Costs Contribution Scheme for energy-intensive SMEs](#), case NL-2022-45/2959 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

ⁱⁱⁱ Eurofound (2022), SME-credit scheme Green (in quality control), case NL-2022-46/3000 (measures in the Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{iv} Eurofound (2020), [Energy Agenda](#), case NL-2020-1/2683 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

Collective bargaining and inflation

How inflation features in wage negotiations

In the 1970s, most collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), included a type of automatic inflation compensation (ACP), meaning that rules were included on the way in which inflation was automatically compensated. This meant that in the seventies with high inflation rates, a wage price spiral occurred with a high increase in wage costs influencing the international competitive position of the business sector. With the famous wage agreement - Akkoord van Wassenaar - in 1982, the ACP has been replaced with a labour time reduction (*arbeidstijdverkorting*) in the majority of the CBAs (AWVN, 2021). APC agreements are still included in some small agreements mainly in the port sector. With the high inflation rates, inclusion of APCs is on the agenda again.

The combination between the high inflation and the tight labour markets creates a different discussion than in previous periods of inflation. Employers are in need of employees and have to offer higher wages and related labour conditions, but an increase of labour costs will lead to higher prices and weakening of their competitive position. Trade union FNV announced a wage demand of 14.3% for 2023. Employers' association AWWN already indicated that employers have little room to increase wages (CBS, 2022j). Furthermore, employers' organisations argue that inflation compensation will increase the inflation levels further. One-time bonuses are considered more effective (NOS, 2022f).

Next or due to inflation, financial health of employees became an important topic. In November Queen Máxima for example launched the national coalition of financial health. The coalition consists of the business sector and organisations that want to support the financial health of employees. The aim of the coalition is to halve the financial problems of employees in seven years. Next to inflation correction, employers gave employees an ad hoc bonus to cover inflation costs or provide ad hoc support to their employees to handle their finance and make them aware of other support available (like energy allowance). Also, the tax scheme related to buying a bike for home-work travel was promoted by some. Some enterprises have given their employees an extra allowance to finance the investments in their houses to make them less energy intensive.

Another important topic was the wellbeing of employees. Next to the increasing pressure on wellbeing caused by physical, organisational and psychosocial risks, employees had to deal with higher work pressure due to the lack of personnel caused by the tight labour market and higher absence rates.

According to AWWN, the collective bargaining agreement-negotiations in 2021 were constructive. Overall, until October, 283 new agreements have been closed, which cover 2.7 million employees. These agreements make up for 68% of the overall agreements which ended in 2022 (AWVN, 2022).

Examples of recent responses

- In September 2022, the first collective bargaining agreement was adjusted to restore purchasing power. This agreement, covering the specialists in painting and maintenance of property, increased wages with 10.3% (OnderhoudNL, 2022).
- The AWWN evaluation of the collective labour agreement year 2022 showed that more wage agreements have been made in euro's instead of percentages, which is more positive for the

relatively low paid employees. Employers also provided more and higher benefits than in previous years, both within and outside the collective labour agreement, to support the purchasing power of employees and help them to deal with inflation. Less attention however has been paid to learning and acquiring skills and experience. On the other side news themes such as inclusion and sustainability of working conditions such as inclusion of a climate budget with which employers support their employees in making their homes more sustainable. These investments can save a lot of money in the long term and contribute to the climate transition.

- In 2023, employees of the retail chain Action will receive a wage increase of 10%. Furthermore, they receive an addition €350 in December. These measures are taken to compensate the employees for the current inflation (Nu.nl, 2022g).
- The collective bargaining organisation of general practitioner care increase the wages of physician assistants and nurses with 4.35%. Additionally, the year-end bonus is increased from 6.5% to 7.5% (LHV, 2022). The increase is related to the higher energy costs and inflation. These additional bonuses occur in more agreements, one of the reasons that bonuses are more popular among employers is that increases in wages are structural and not so easily adapted when economic situation become 'normal' again. Inflation has a temporary character (NRC, 2022).

Developments in working time

As described before, the country started in lockdown and after March, COVID-19 restrictions related to work were released. In 2021 and 2022 many enterprises already prepared internal rules regarding hybrid working. Given the relatively large focus of the economy on the services sector and the available technical infrastructure, hybrid working is feasible in a relatively large part of the business sector. However, these internal agreements affected not the working time but more the place to work.

In 2022 the House of Representatives approved the Law on Work where you want (Wet werken waar je wilt). This means a change in the Law on Flex work (Wet flexibel werken (Wfw)) The aim of the change is to put employees in a better position to reach a better work-life balance. This means that a request of an employee to adapt the place to work must be treated in the same way as a request to change daily working hours or work duration. In practice this means that an employer can only reject a request to work at another place if there are compelling business or service interests. Per the law, another place is defined as the place that is not on the employer's premises. The law stipulates that the place of work, that is other than the employer's premises, must be a residential address within the Netherlands or the European Union. Alternatively, the law also mentions that 'another place' can also be a place of work that is suitable with the line of work from where usual work is performed for the benefit of the employer. At time of writing of this annual report it is still not clear as to when the senate will approve the changes as the bill is still in its written stage and it is not yet clear as of when the bill can be finalized in order to be voted upon for its adoption.

Changes to legislation

There have not been any changes in the legislation related to the working time duration and/or working time organisation in 2022. The implementation of the Transparent and Predictable Terms of Employment Act (Wet-transparante-en-voorspelbare-arbeidsvoorwaarden) may be indirectly relevant to determine working time duration and/or working time organisation. In August 2022, this act based on the EU directive with the same name came into force. The aim of this law is to strengthen the position of the employee with respect to the employer. The Dutch legislation included already many of the requirements set in the directive. Main changes relate to the provision of compulsory training by the employer to the employee, the prohibition of ancillary work by the employee, and the possibility for the employee to request more predictable working conditions. In addition, some additional obligations hold regarding written or electronic provision of information to new and existing employees.

Bargaining outcomes

Work time duration and/or working time organisation were also not a major topic during collective bargaining in 2022. The Netherlands has a tradition of part-time working. Overall, women work more often part-time than men (CBS, 2022k).

Debates on duration and organisation

The Law on Work where you want and the Transparent and Predictable Terms of Employment Act are already discussed above. As described, there is a severe labour shortage in many sectors in the

Netherlands. Given that a relatively large share of the population works part-time, extending their contract to more working hours could already solve part of the problem. In September, the government announced a pilot project related to the introduction of full-time bonuses (voltijdsbonus) in schools. The aim of the pilot is to see which measures are effective and what the effects are of providing a bonus. In November 2022, schools willing to participate in the scheme were invited to contact the Ministry of Education and Culture. The government will support the schools with practical support and guidance in developing a bonus scheme. The schools have to finance the bonus.

In 2020, the minister asked the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (College van de rechten van de mens) for advice on the introduction of full-time bonuses (voltijdsbonus) in long-term care and the education sector. The advice was sent to the House of Representatives in April 2022. The major points of consideration were that employees working already full-time do not receive the bonus and that this is an indirect way of gender discrimination as relatively more women work part-time. If all full-time employees receive the bonus these issues could be partly solved.

In the meantime, initiatives are set up to stimulate part-timers to work more, such as the foundation Catch the potential (Stichting Het Potentieel Pakken). The foundation support employers in the care and education sector that want to introduce bonuses for working more hours. The Rijnstate hospital, for example, was one of the first that introduced a 'full-time bonus' for nurses which increased the number of working hours. Trade unions reacted critically to this new bonus scheme. They argue that healthcare personnel are already working more hours than they are getting paid and that there is already a high workload in the sector (Nu.nl, 2022b).

Labour market shortages and social partners

As described before, labour shortages occurred in 2022 in almost every sector in the Netherlands. The Employee Insurance Agency (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemers-verzekeringen, UWV) calculated that the labour market is twice as tight as in 2021. In the second quarter, for every 100 unemployed, there were 143 open vacancies (UWV, 2022a). Although the number of open vacancies decreased in the third quarter, the labour market was still very tight (CBS, 2022c). The causes are various: the relatively large share of part-timers, the ageing workforce, the lack of properly skilled personnel, higher sick rates due to work pressure, etc. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic had its impact. Employees retired earlier than usual and the level of absenteeism, was and still is relatively high.

The COVID-19 restriction measures also had its impacts. In particular (young) flexworkers from the accommodation and food services sector and retail sector moved to delivery services and medical services.

The coalition agreement of Rutte IV, which was presented in January 2022, includes a major restructuring of the labour market, improving the livelihoods of people with low and middle incomes and reducing taxes. As this was the first year of this new government, no new policy measures could be expected, apart from the crises that the government had to deal with, such as COVID-19, invasion of Russia in Ukraine, inflation, reduction of carbon emissions and the energy transition.

The 2020 report of the Employment Regulation Committee (Borstlap Committee) and the chapter “Labour market, income distribution and equal opportunities” will be the guideline for policies to be developed. In June 2021, the Social and Economic Council (SER) presented the report “Strengthen the agility and resilience of our economy to provide people with greater security”. This advisory report is directed at the new government and the policy it should develop in the period 2021-2025. The new government needed ‘to invest heavily in broad welfare, i.e., in security of employment and income, in future earning capacity, in strong public services and a sustainable living environment’.

In May 2022, the Social and Economic Council (SER), the main tripartite body, published their advice for tackling the labour market shortages and improve the labour market. In the short term, the SER sees five promising options: enable and encourage people to work more hours, cherish employees by implementing good employment practices and good management, improve innovation and smarter working to increase productivity and reduce administrative burden in combination with the creation of a culture of trust in employees and professionals (SER, 2022c). The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) is an advisory body in which employers, employees and independent experts (Crown-appointed members) work together to reach agreement on key social and economic issues and advises the Dutch government and Parliament on social and economic policy.

Based on these reports, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment presented in June the labour market reform plan of the cabinet. The government concludes that due to trends such as technological development, changing work preferences, globalisation, aging, and energy transition, the structure and design of the labour market no longer automatically has the desired results for society and economy.

The government distinguishes six important policy themes which will be further developed.

1. Encouraging long-term employment relationships within agile companies and better regulation of temporary contracts. In principle, employment contracts for an indefinite period should be mainstream. Other forms of contract can be used but no longer as a way to compete on labour conditions. This will improve job and income security of workers. Employing people should stay attractive but enterprises at the same time should have enough flexibility to react to changing circumstances.
2. A better level playing field between employee and self-employed, more clear and payable rules and enforcement. Self-employed should have space and support, but bogus self-employment should be avoided. This requires that the playing field between workers should become more equal in terms of tax treatment and social security. Tax and social security incentives that now make self-employment more attractive than employment contracts should be adjusted. Next, also the enforcement of compliance with the legal framework needs to be intensified.
3. Always perspectives for new work. People who are jobless or have to change work should have the certainty that there is always perspective of other work by encouraging lifelong learning. The government, together with social partners, municipalities and the UWV, will develop a proper system to provide guidance to people to find work.
4. The government and the social partners are working towards a labour market infrastructure that offers workers, job seekers and employers, access to integrated, recognisable and easily accessible services.
5. Adjustments in disability legislation (WIA). The government has expressed its ambition to improve labour participation and the position of disabled. Together with the social partners, the government will develop possible reforms in legislation which are needed to fulfil this ambition.
6. Participate in the basics of the labour market. All citizens deserve a good life and should be able to participate. Together with municipalities, people who are on social assistance for a long time are actively approached to see how they can be supported and encouraged to find work. In addition, for example the budget for sheltered workplaces will be expanded for people who cannot turn to a regular employer.

Other important policy developments

Employment status and contracts

As described above, encouraging long-term employment relationships within agile companies and better regulation of temporary contracts is one of the six themes of the labour market revision plan. In principle, employment contracts for an indefinite period should be mainstream. Other forms of contract can be used but no longer as a way to compete on labour conditions. This will improve job and income security of workers. Employing people should stay attractive but enterprises at the same time should have enough flexibility to react to changing circumstances.

In 2022, the labour market shortage did not lead to an increase of fixed contracts. This can be explained by the fact that more people entered the labour market again after the pandemic. New employees are often granted a temporary contract.

Self-employed

As described above, a better level playing field between employee and self-employed, more clear and payable rules and enforcement is one of the six themes of the labour market revision plan. Self-employed should have space and support but bogus self-employment should be avoided. This requires that the playing field between workers should become more equal in terms of tax treatment and social security. Tax and social security incentives that now make self-employment more attractive than employment contracts should be adjusted. Next, also the enforcement of compliance with the legal framework needs to be intensified.

As described before, the self-employed allowance (Zelfstandigenaftrek) – tax allowance - will be reduced in 2022 and beyond.

Wage setting

There is an ongoing discussion on lifting the moderate wage setting. Hans Borstlap (chair of the Committee Borstlap) argues that moderate wage setting could have harmful spill-over effects on the economy, such as limiting productivity, perversely operating income supplements, and stagnating participation of beneficiaries. Instead, Borstlap advocates for the structural upward revision of wages, with minimum wage being enough to provide for the basic needs of people (Volkskrant, 2022a).

In September 2022, the government announced an increase in the minimum wages of 10.15% from 1 January 2023 onwards. This percentage is higher than the normal bi-annual indexation as the cabinet decided to implement an unusual rise of 8.05%. This rise is one of the measures of the purchasing power agreement which is presented before. It is the first time since 1969, when the minimum wage was introduced, that the government additionally increased the wages. Allowances that are related to the minimum wage - the state pension and welfare allowance - will increase by the same percentage (Rijksoverheid, 2022h).

Moreover, some collective bargaining agreements are abandoning the minimum youth wage, which means that all employees of 18 years and older will earn at least minimum wage. Among the agreements which abandoned the minimum youth wage are IKEA, GEO (Commodities, Energy and Environment), public services, and the national railway company (NS). Nonetheless, a lot of sectors

with relatively a lot of young employees are still maintaining the youth minimum wage. Trade union FNV argues that youth minimum wage is a form of age discrimination (FNV, 2022).

Gender pay gap

On average, women in the Netherlands earn 13% less per hour than their male colleagues. In recent years, this wage gap has narrowed, according to the 'Monitor wage differences between men and women, 2020' published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). To discuss the broader inequality between men and women on the labour market, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment announced a social dialogue on this topic on 14 November - Equal Pay Day.

Next to that, the government will provide grants to social initiatives that focus on tackling the gender pay gap, such as the Equal Pay of WOMEN project, for which SZW provides a subsidy. This project supports employers who want to assure equal pay in the workplace. The government will also support the campaign 'I earn more'. Through this campaign social organisations emphasise the importance of equal pay and this is seen as important to improve social attention to this topic which is necessary to enable further steps. Men and women should also have the same access to the labour market which is facilitated by other measures included in the revised labour market plan such as described above and below.

According to the LHBT-monitor of Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), transgender persons have lower incomes than cisgender persons. The main cause is that transgender persons have more difficulty in finding a job. Those who do work, earn less than their cisgender co-workers. The underlying mechanism of this finding is unknown by the Institute (SCP, 2022).

Health and safety

In 2022, all Member States carried out the European campaign Lifting the load. In the Netherlands the campaign is called 'How TOP do you work (Hoe TOP werk jij? Pak lichamelijke belasting aan!). In this context, a large variety of activities was carried out in close cooperation with employers and employee organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. The campaign is part of the government policy on creating health and safety working conditions in which people can work longer. This is the best for employers and employees. Policies focus on prevention and are developed in close cooperation with social partners and all relevant institutions.

As discussed, being exposed to the psychosocial risks is one of the major causes of work pressure. It includes undesirable behaviour, such as harassment, aggression and violence, discrimination or sexual harassment. In 2022, the government has appointed a government commissioner (Mariëtte Hamer) to develop a national action program against sexually transgressive behaviour and sexual violence, that will be launched in early 2023.

Next to work pressure, occupational diseases can be caused by working with dangerous substances. For victims it was hard to obtain compensation through courts. Therefore, from 2023, victims will be able to claim one-time financial compensation. This scheme will be initially applied to three types of occupational diseases: lung cancer from asbestos, allergic asthma and CSE. In the coming years, this list will be expanded. A supporting player in this scheme is the National Expert Centre for Substance-Related Occupational Diseases. This partnership of five institutes will focus on the development, collection, and dissemination of knowledge regarding occupational diseases (Rijksoverheid, 2022n).

Work–life balance

As described before, the Law Work where you want was approved by the House of Representatives in 2022. The aim of the change in the Law on Flex work (Wet flexibel werken, Wfw) is to put employees in a better position to reach a better work-life balance.

In August 2022, the law on paid parental leave has been implemented. This new law allows parents to take paid leave of 9 weeks within the first year of their new-born. The compensation is 70% of daily wage paid by the UWV to the employer. The aim of this law is to allow parents to get used to their new situation. This also gives them the opportunity to make conscious choices about their new work-life balance. Parents have the choice to take up all their leave at once or divide it over the baby's first year (UWV, 2022b). The paid parental leave is widely used. In November, the weekly applications were around 3,000 per week (Rijksoverheid 2022d).

In October 2022, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment announced a cooperation with several government agencies to reform the childcare financing system. During the reform, the organisations will be in close contact with stakeholders. The aim of the new government is to simplify the system and to make it more affordable. The ambition of the cabinet is that in the new system, 96% of the maximum price will be subsidised by the government, regardless of the parents' incomes. Consequently, it is expected that this reform will increase the demand for childcare (Rijksoverheid, 2022c). One of the major bottlenecks in the reform, however, is the lack of available personnel that can cover this increased demand. In this light, the government aims to ease the quality requirements of childcare. These measures are mainly focused on the so-called 'three-hour rule' and 'fixed-face criterion'. This allows more flexibility for the childcare facilities to switch their personnel when needed. Nevertheless, the personnel-child ratio remains unchanged (Rijksoverheid, 2022b).

Lifelong learning and skills

Promotion of lifelong learning is one of the tools included in the labour market reform plan presented in June 2022, to improve the perspectives for new work of people who are jobless or have to change work. This will be further developed together with social partners, municipalities and the UWV.

In 2022, the government implemented two important measures to stimulate life-long learning. First, the STEP budget (STAP-budget) was introduced. Under this scheme employed and people searching for work receive a grant of €1,000 to attend training activities. The subsidy measure replaces the tax deduction for training (Rijksoverheid, 2022k). Around 200,000 people received the grant, and the participation was well spread over age and educational level. Unfortunately, there were also indications of misuse, such as attracting participants with presents and offering non-labour market related training. To improve the effectiveness, the government plans to make the scheme more targeted in 2023 (Rijksoverheid, 2022l).

The second important scheme is the Expedition scheme (Expeditieregeling). The aim of the scheme is to stimulate society to initiate and develop interventions, practices and methodologies to stimulate sustainable employment and lifelong learning. Employers' organisations, industry associations, enterprises - in collaboration with a research institution - can apply for a grant to implement workplace experiments (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2022).

Working life of Ukrainian refugees

Employment and working conditions

By the end of 2022, around 85,000 Ukrainian refugees were registered with Dutch municipalities. According to CBS, 35% of the 50,000 Ukrainian refugees between 15 to 65 years old had a paid job on 1 July 2022. Most of them had temporary contracts and worked part-time: 52% worked less than 20 hours a week. 15% of the Ukrainian refugees worked full-time. Overall, most Ukrainian refugees worked within the professional services, which includes employment agencies. This makes it difficult to further explore the sectors in which these workers end up. Other sectors with relative a lot of Ukrainian workers are the trade, transportation, and hospitality industry (CBS, 2022d). As of 1 November 2022, the transition period for work permits for Ukrainians ended. From then on, Ukrainian refugees need to have a valid sticker or document indicating that they are allowed to work under the Temporary Protection Directive.^v

There are abuses with the deployment of the refugees. Trade union CVV CNV discovered the abuse of a group of Ukrainian refugees, which were deployed by the Polish employment agencies Janpol. These women were forced to work in for a plant grower. The contract which these women signed included notions of fines and prohibitions, and threatened with 'deportation' (Volkskrant, 2022c). To overcome further incidents of abuse, a bill for mandatory certification of employment agencies will be sent to the parliament in 2023. This bill should improve the living and working conditions of labour migrants in general (not only Ukrainian refugees) (Rijksoverheid, 2022o).

To facilitate childcare for the Ukrainian refugees which are participating in the labour market, an adjustment will be made within the childcare law. This adjustment allowed the refugees to make use of the childcare subsidies provided by the government. When complying to the criteria, the refugees could apply to these subsidies since June 2022 (Rijksoverheid, 2022p).

Social partner initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees

There are many initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees, though social partner involvement has been scarce. For example, *Refugeehelp.nl*, a platform providing all basic information for Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands. It covers, amongst others, information about housing, healthcare, education, and legal aid.^{vi} There is also the online job platform *Refugeework.nl*, which links jobseekers with a refugee background to employers. The reason for developing RefugeeWork is the challenge for refugees to be able to participate in the labour process, the arrival of large groups of refugees from Ukraine, some of whom are also looking for work, and the tightness on the labour market. Employers and jobseekers find each other through the platform, which offers information in 11 languages. Besides job offers, information can also be found on legal regulations for employers and topics such as cultural differences.^{vii} Both of these examples are NGO initiatives.

Doorzaam (2022) supports temporary workers, employment agencies and employers to ease the sustainable working relationship between the Ukrainian refugee and their employer. Doorzaam provides amongst others hand-on information, products, and subsidies. Doorzaam is a paritarian institution by social partners in the temporary work agency sector.

While not having social partner involvement, the Regulation on medical care for displaced persons from Ukraine^{viii} and Setting up new accommodation for refugees from Ukraine in Dutch regions^{ix} are also worth mentioning here. The SER (2022a) also provides several examples of social partner initiatives:

- Employment agencies, such as Randstad Uitzendbureau (n.d.), Fideel Recruitment (n.d.), JG Flex Recruitment (n.d.) and Olympia (n.d.) help Ukrainian refugees to enter the Dutch labour market. Moreover, Olympia hired two refugees themselves and actively guides them at their workplace.
- *Regionaal Werkcentrum Groot-Amsterdam* (n.d.) provides information for refugees on entering the labour market. Social partners, along with other parties relevant in the regional labor market are involved in this network. Together they try to match labor demand and supply, connect employers and guide employees to training, education and new jobs.

^v Eurofound (2022), [Temporary exemption work permit for displaced persons from Ukraine](#), case NL-2022-14/2809 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{vi} Eurofound (2022), [Refugeehelp.nl: A webpage for refugees and helpers](#), case NL-2022-9/2206 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{vii} Eurofound (2022), [Refugeework.nl \(in quality control, add link later\)](#), case NL-2022-46/3002 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{viii} Eurofound (2022), [Regulation on medical care for displaced persons from Ukraine](#), case NL-2022-27/2747 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{ix} Eurofound (2022), [Setting up new accommodation for refugees from Ukraine in Dutch regions](#), case NL-2022-11/2207 (measures in Netherlands), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

Commentary and outlook

2022 started in lockdown, but in the first months of the year most of the COVID-19 measures were abandoned. In January 2022, the new government was installed, and the new coalition agreement was the guideline for future policies. The economic development in 2021 was very good and prospects for 2022 were similar. But already in the first half of the year the country had to face with severe challenges, next to coping with the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had a big impact. The energy prices showed a substantial increase and had severe consequences due to the relatively high use of gas in the business sector as well as in households. In June, the government announced the energy crisis. In addition, the influx of Ukrainian refugees, in combination with the increase of migrants put high pressure on the possibilities to provide shelter and to handle migrant procedures.

Another large challenge was the carbon crisis. Emission rates are relatively high relative to the size of the country and severe actions on the short-term were and are needed as the European Commission did not accept further delay in reaching the reduction agreements.

The other major challenges which also existed the year before was and is the very tight labour market due to lack of personnel with skills needed, flex workers that moved to other sectors during COVID-19, relatively high disease rates, etc. This led to an increase of wages offered to new personnel and a high volatility of personnel in and across sectors.

During COVID-19, the government and the majority of enterprises have developed internal rules regarding hybrid work which came into force in 2022. These did not impact the working time but the working place. Given the positive results of home working for the work-life balance, the House of Representatives approved the Law Work where you want, which means that employers can only reject a request to work at another place if there are compelling business or service interests. To stimulate part-timers to work, the government started up a pilot project on the introduction of a full-time bonus in the education sectors.

Traditionally, the social dialogue between government, employers and employee organisations is well organised in the country. Overall, the negotiations on collective agreements proceeded well. Yet, they were complicated given all the challenges to be faced such as high levels of inflation, slowly increasing interest rates and higher production and labour costs. Next to relatively high absence rates, the high work pressure with its impacts on the well-being, and the financial health of employees were and are on the agenda. Next to inflation correction, employers provide one-time allowances to compensate the reduction in purchasing power, allowances to cover energy savings investments in houses, or provide advice to employees how to deal with private finance and make use of government purchasing power packages. Inflation correction seems to be the most important topic of discussion and there are signs that the number of strikes is increasing.

Given that the new government was formed only in January 2022, the focus was on transferring the coalition agreement in policies. In June, the government presented an extensive labour market reform plan. Due to trends such as technological development, changing work preferences, globalisation, aging, and energy transition, the structure and design of the labour market no longer automatically has the desired results society and economy. The plan is now under further development and is expected to have a large impact on the labour market.

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