36,000 more people in IT, and the market still cools

IT vacancies are falling and unemployment among IT professionals is rising, yet employment in IT occupations grows faster than in any other group.

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Summary

The Dutch IT labour market has been cooling since 2023. Yet employment in IT occupations grew by 36,000 year on year in the second quarter of 2026, the largest increase of any occupational group. Those figures do not contradict each other: the market is normalising after an exceptional peak, but the constraint has moved from volume to fit. In 2024, 63% of companies that tried to recruit IT staff failed to fill every vacancy.

Describe the Dutch IT labour market of 2026 with a single number and you will pick the wrong one. The three most quoted indicators point in three directions.

Three figures that appear to contradict

In the fourth quarter of 2025 there were nearly 18,800 open IT vacancies, a number falling since 2023. In February 2026, more than 6,200 IT professionals were claiming unemployment benefit, a number rising fast since early 2023. And in the second quarter of 2026, employment in IT occupations grew by 36,000 year on year, the largest increase of any occupational group.

Vacancies are down and unemployment is up. That points to a looser market. At the same time, employment in IT occupations grows harder than in any other group. That points the other way.

Both are true. Employment keeps growing, only no longer at the pace of 2021 and 2022. What disappeared is not the demand, but the ease with which that demand was met.

What cooled

Between the first quarter of 2021 and the third quarter of 2022, IT employment grew hard, driven by digitalisation and automation. That growth stalled at the end of 2022. Employment fell slightly in 2023, fell again in early 2025, and recovered in the second half of 2025.

The pivot year is 2024. IT vacancies fell 13% that year while the number of IT professionals on unemployment benefit rose 22%. Two movements in opposite directions, in the same year, in the same occupational group.

UWV names three causes for rising unemployment: reorganisations at employers with large IT workforces, banks among them and often linked to AI investment, a rise in bankruptcies across 2023 and 2024, and rising labour productivity that gets the same work done with fewer people. ING adds economic headwind.

The composition of that unemployment changed too. Where claims used to come mainly from people over 50, since 2023 more claimants are between 27 and 50. That is not a fringe effect at the end of a career but a shift in the middle of one.

Why vacancies stay hard to fill

A looser market should be easier to hire in. That only partly happened. Of the Dutch companies that sought IT specialists in 2024, 63% had one or more hard-to-fill vacancies. In 2022 that was 70%, in 2018 it was 69%. The decline is real, but modest next to a far steeper fall in vacancies.

The market got looser without getting easier. That gap is exactly what recruitment is about.

The reasons employers give explain why. Too few applications is cited by 56% of Dutch companies against 43% across the EU. Missing IT skills is cited by 51% against 42%, missing work experience by 41% against 41%, and salary expectations by 39% against 42%.

The Netherlands departs from the European average on two points. Too few applications is cited far more often here, and so are missing IT skills. On salary expectations the Netherlands scores lower than the EU. So the problem is rarely that the candidate costs too much. The problem is that the candidate does not apply, or applies without the skills asked for.

The split market

The cooling does not reach everyone equally. Demand for experienced specialists stays strong while entry-level positions come under pressure. That difference is what makes the headline figures misleading.

Demand is shifting toward specialist profiles: cloud, cybersecurity, data and AI. Generic IT roles are losing ground. The mismatch that creates does not dissolve when supply increases.

AI and automation hit entry-level jobs hardest. At the same time, enrolment in IT education is falling. Those two movements reinforce each other. If companies select harder on experience, juniors get fewer chances to build it, and in a few years the layer that should have become experienced is missing.

Steer only by seniority and you buy speed today at the cost of capacity tomorrow.

Where the IT jobs actually sit

At the end of 2025 the Netherlands counted roughly 575,000 people working in IT occupations. Of those, 38% work in the information and communication sector. The other 62% work in business services, public administration, industry and retail.

That is one of the most underrated figures about this market. An employer who defines the competition for IT staff as software companies is looking at barely more than a third of the field. A recruiter who only calls IT companies is doing the same.

In 2013, 282,000 people worked in an IT occupation. By 2025 that was 562,000 on the CBS occupational classification. A doubling in twelve years, the strongest growth of all thirteen occupational classes.

The Netherlands in European perspective

The vacancy rate in the Dutch information and communication sector stood at 5.1% in the second quarter of 2025. The EU average was 2.4% and Germany 3.0%. Only Belgium sits at the same level, at 5.2%.

On hard-to-fill IT vacancies the Netherlands also scores high: 63% against 58% in the EU. Only Germany is higher at 72%. Norway sits at the other end of the range at 31%.

What this means for hiring in 2026

- **Waiting for applications does not work.** Too few applications is the most cited reason an IT vacancy stays open. An advertisement by definition does not reach the people who are not looking.
- **The available supply sits mid-career.** Benefit claims shifted toward ages 27 to 50. That is the group with experience that was barely available three years ago.

- **Look outside the IT sector.** 62% of IT professionals work for employers that do not see themselves as IT companies.
- **Salary is not the main brake.** Dutch employers cite salary expectations less often than the EU average. An offer fails more often on skills and experience than on money.

Method and sources

Figures on vacancies, benefit claims and sector distribution come from UWV, measured in the fourth quarter of 2025 and February 2026. Figures on employment per occupational group come from CBS StatLine, measured in the second quarter of 2026. The 2024 annual figures and the split market come from the ING sector analysis of April 2026. Vacancy rates and hard-to-fill IT vacancies come from Eurostat, datasets jvs_q_nace2 and isoc_ske_itrcrn2.

CBS and UWV report slightly different totals for the number of IT professionals, 562,000 against 575,000, following from different measurement dates and definitions. Both figures appear here attributed to the source they come from.

Shortage, IT market, IT

Sources

- CBS StatLine, CC BY 4.0
- UWV arbeidsmarktinformatie
- ING sectoronderzoek
- Eurostat, CC BY 4.0