Near the bottom on STEM

9.0% of employed Dutch people hold a degree in science, engineering or ICT, against 11.1% on average in the EU and 12.3% in Germany. The Netherlands ranks 22nd of 30 countries.

Summary

The Dutch economy runs on technology, but its working population is thinly educated in it. In 2025, 9.0% of employed people held a completed tertiary degree in the STEM fields of science, engineering or ICT, against 11.1% on average in the EU. That puts the Netherlands 22nd of the 30 measured countries; Lithuania leads with 15.1%. The stock is growing, from 748,700 workers in 2021 to 869,500 in 2025, a rise of 16%. Of them, 65% work as professionals and some 12% outside the knowledge occupations.

This library showed earlier that the number of Dutch ICT graduates nearly tripled and the shortage held. This paper measures the other side: not the yearly intake, but the stock. How many working people hold a technical or scientific degree, and how does that compare with the rest of Europe?

Near the bottom of the European ranking

In 2025, 9.0% of employed Dutch people held a completed tertiary degree in a STEM field: science, mathematics, ICT or engineering. The EU average is 11.1%.

9.0% of employed Dutch people hold a STEM degree

Employed people with a tertiary STEM degree as a share of all employed, 2025. Eurostat, hrst_stem_occ, retrieved 1 September 2026.

Of the 30 measured countries the Netherlands ranks 22nd. Above it stand not only the usual suspects Sweden and Finland, but also Spain, France, Poland and Bulgaria. Below it sit mostly southern and central European countries, with Italy at 6.4%.

The stock grows, the gap stays

In absolute numbers the Dutch stock is growing firmly: from 748,700 employed STEM graduates in 2021 to 869,500 in 2025, a rise of 16% in four years. That squares with the increased intake from education this library described earlier.

Yet the share stays low, because the whole working population grew along and the other countries did not stand still. The structural conclusion from the graduates paper becomes visible here in the stock: the Netherlands educates relatively few people technically, and that is not a snapshot but a feature of the labour market.

Where the STEM-educated work

How the scarce stock is spent is a figure in its own right. Of the 869,500 employed STEM graduates in 2025:

- 563,600 work as professionals, 65% of the total
- 114,800 work as technicians or associate professionals
- 85,000 work as managers
- 106,100, some 12%, work in clerical, service, trades or elementary occupations

That last group is the striking one: more than a hundred thousand technically educated people work outside the knowledge occupations. Part of that is voluntary career choice, but in a market with 195 official shortage occupations it is also a quiet reserve that already lives and works in the Netherlands.

What this figure does not say

- STEM is broader than technology in the everyday sense. The definition also counts mathematics, natural sciences and construction-related degrees. Whoever means only ICT or only installation trades must measure narrower.
- The counter counts degrees, not skills. Whoever programs without a science degree falls outside it; whoever holds a physics degree and works in sales counts.
- The series only starts in 2021, so no long trend exists yet. And Iceland reports a 2025 value of 1.95% that, next to every neighbour, points to a break; it is left out of the comparison rather than quoted.

What this means

- **The quotable number.** 9.0% of employed Dutch people hold a STEM degree, against 11.1% in the EU and 12.3% in Germany. The Netherlands ranks 22nd of 30.
- **The technical shortage is a stock problem.** Not only is the yearly intake modest; the whole educated base is thin. This changes in years, not quarters.
- **The quiet reserve already lives here.** More than 100,000 STEM graduates work outside the knowledge occupations. Winning them back is faster than educating and closer than international recruitment.
- **German benchmarks do not fit.** The German labour market holds proportionally more than a third more STEM graduates. Recruitment strategies that work there assume a stock that does not exist here.

Method and sources

The figures come from Eurostat, dataset hrst_stem_occ, employed people aged 15 to 74 with a completed tertiary degree in the STEM fields of natural sciences and mathematics, ICT, and engineering including manufacturing and construction, broken down by occupation group under ISCO 2008, reference years 2021 through 2025, retrieved on 1 September 2026, licensed CC BY 4.0.

The shares are the percentages Eurostat publishes. As a check we recomputed them as the number of employed STEM graduates divided by all employed people aged 15 to 74 from dataset lfsa_egan; that reproduces the published shares within roughly 0.15 percentage points for every country, so the figure

reads as a share of the employed. The ranking counts 30 countries with a 2025 value; within it, Iceland is named as a suspected series break rather than listed as the lowest. The occupation breakdown does not always sum exactly to the total due to rounding.

Europe, Education, All markets, Engineering, IT

Sources

- Eurostat (hrst_stem_occ), werkenden met een STEM-diploma naar beroep, CC BY 4.0
- Eurostat (lfsa_egan), werkzame personen, CC BY 4.0