# One in four clerks is gone

Since 2013 the Netherlands lost 24% of its administrative clerks and 45% of its secretarial staff, while business and administration specialists doubled. The back office shrinks from the bottom.

**Summary**

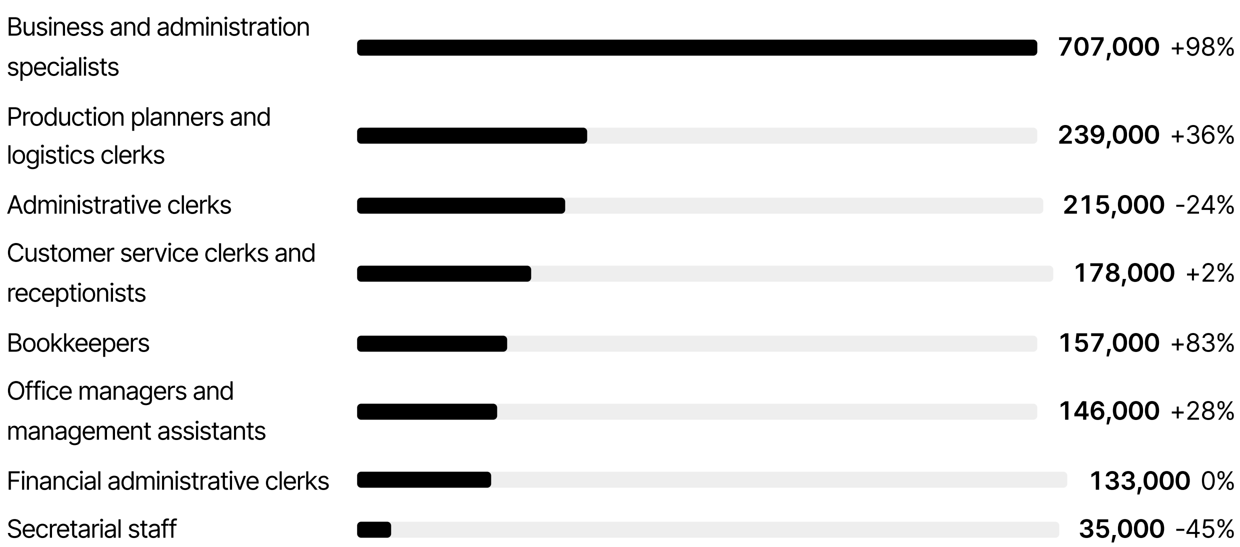
The Netherlands employed 215,000 administrative clerks in 2025 against 283,000 in 2013, a fall of 24.0% over a period in which the employed labour force grew 16.6%. Secretarial staff went from 64,000 to 35,000, down 45.3%. Administrative personnel as a whole fell from 829,000 to 801,000 and its share of all jobs from 9.8% to 8.1%. At the top of the same occupational class the opposite happened: business and administration specialists went from 357,000 to 707,000, a doubling, with accountants, management consultants, policy advisers, and HR specialists each growing around 100%. New vacancies for administrative personnel fell from 158,200 in 2022 to 114,500 in 2025, 27.6% fewer, against 8.6% fewer for all occupations. Those still in clerical work are old: 31.0% are 55 or over, against 23.3% of all workers. That makes a shrinking occupation a hiring problem for years to come.

## The back office shrinks from the bottom

Employment in the Netherlands has grown for twelve years. One occupation has not joined in. In 2025 the country employed 215,000 administrative clerks, against 283,000 in 2013. That is 24.0% fewer over a period in which the employed labour force went from 8.43 million to 9.83 million, 16.6% more.

Secretarial staff disappeared faster still: from 64,000 to 35,000, down 45.3%. Administrative personnel as a whole, the groups the CBS gathers under code 043, fell from 829,000 to 801,000. Its share of all jobs dropped from 9.8% to 8.1%.

**215,000** administrative clerks in 2025, against 283,000 in 2013




Employed labour force aged 15 to 74 by occupational group, annual average 2025, followed by the change since 2013. CBS StatLine 86320NED, BRC 2014 edition 2025. The survey changed its design in 2021; the decline in administrative clerks runs from 2018.

So the back office is not disappearing as a whole. It disappears at the bottom, where the work consists of entering, sorting, and passing on, and grows at the top.

## What the figures say

The occupational class that holds administration, business and administrative occupations, grew from 1.49 million in 2013 to 1.90 million in 2025, faster than the labour force as a whole. The growth is in the specialists: from 357,000 to 707,000. Accountants went from 68,000 to 132,000, management and organisation consultants from 98,000 to 204,000, policy advisers from 59,000 to 123,000, and HR and career specialists from 71,000 to 145,000. Bookkeepers, an associate professional group, went from 86,000 to 157,000.

Within administrative personnel the picture is mixed. Customer service clerks and receptionists held steady at 178,000. Financial administrative clerks stood at 133,000 in 2025, exactly their 2013 level, after a peak of 155,000 in 2023. Production planners and logistics clerks grew from 176,000 to 239,000. The decline concentrates in the two groups closest to the keyboard.

Vacancies point the same way. In 2022, 158,200 vacancies arose for administrative personnel; in 2025, 114,500, or 27.6% fewer. For all occupations together, new vacancies fell 8.6% over those years, from 1.55 million to 1.42 million. For business and administration specialists the count held at 81,600.

**114,500** new vacancies for administrative personnel in 2025


Vacancies arising per year for occupational segment 043, administrative personnel, all industries, from online vacancy observation. CBS StatLine 85081NED, provisional figures.

UWV, the benefits agency, sees the same in its tightness measure by occupation. In the first quarter of 2026, 87 of 93 occupational groups were tight or very tight. Secretaries and bookkeeping clerks were among the six that were not.

## Why it shrinks from the bottom

The decline does not start with generative AI. Administrative clerks stood at 293,000 in 2018 and have fallen every year since, including 2019 and 2020, before any language model sat in an office. The software that reads invoices, books appointments, and fills in forms came first.

What the figures show is a shift inside the occupational class itself. Work a clerk did is done by software with a specialist behind it, and the CBS counts that specialist in a different group. The 350,000 specialists added since 2013 are not replacements for the 68,000 clerks who left, but they work on the same processes: administration, personnel, finance.

What AI adds is not yet visible in the counts, but it is visible in expectations. UWV's 2025 report on AI names administrative occupations as the group that already carried a high automation risk and where AI may speed the trend. Of employers who expect AI to change specific functions, 25% name administrative staff first, more than any other function. The OECD estimates that 37.1% of Dutch workers were exposed to generative AI in 2022, meaning a fifth or more of their tasks could be done in half the time with it.

Employers now say it themselves. DNB, the central bank, announced in November 2025 that it would cut 10% of its budget, about €60m, with job losses and an internal reorganisation. In the supervisor's own budget that is called overhead: support services such as HR, office automation, and premises.

## What cuts against it

Three things blunt the figure.

First, the fall in administrative personnel as a whole is small: 3.4% since 2013, 3.7% since 2019. Anyone who looks only at code 043 sees a stable group of more than 800,000 people. The shrinkage is a story about two occupational groups, not about administration as a whole.

Second, there is a break in the series. The labour force survey changed its design in 2021, and the CBS says figures by occupation can jump between 2020 and 2021. For business services agents that jump is visible, from 114,000 to 79,000. For administrative clerks the decline runs evenly through the break, which makes the figure more credible, but a comparison of 2013 with 2025 remains a comparison across two surveys.

Third, a shrinking occupation is not an occupation without vacancies. Of administrative personnel, 31.0% were 55 or over in 2025, against 23.3% of all workers. Among administrative clerks it is 34.0%, among financial administrative clerks 36.8%. UWV expects administrative clerks to stay tight through 2030 precisely because replacement demand exceeds the loss of jobs. Jobs disappear and vacancies remain, at the same time.

**31.0%** of administrative personnel were aged 55 or over in 2025


Workers aged 55 to 74 as a share of all workers in the occupational group, annual average 2025, followed by 2013. CBS StatLine 86320NED. Secretarial staff is a small group of 35,000; its share is less precise.

## The Netherlands beside its neighbours

Eurostat counts clerical occupations as ISCO major group 4. In the Netherlands that group fell from 816,000 in 2011 to 759,000 in 2025, 7.0% fewer, and from 10.0% of all workers to 8.1%. Across the EU the group grew 4.3% over the same years and its share slipped from 9.9% to 9.4%.

**8.1%** of Dutch workers held a clerical occupation in 2025


Workers aged 15 to 64 in ISCO major group 4, clerical support workers, as a share of all workers, 2025 followed by 2011. Eurostat lfsa_egais, extracted 10 September 2026. Every country carries a break in series in 2021; France follows a different definition from 2021.

The Nordic countries are already below 6%, Germany holds 12.4%. The Netherlands sits between them and is moving north. The Dutch peak was 2022, at 840,000; 81,000 went in three years.

Demand has fallen harder outside the Netherlands than inside. Indeed counts the postings on its own site per country and, outside the Netherlands, per job category. The Dutch index stood 34.3% below its June 2022 peak in early September 2026. In Germany, postings for HR roles stood 65.3% below their peak, customer service 62.9%, and administrative assistance 48.4%, against 39.2% for all postings. In France and the United Kingdom, HR postings fell 72.9% and 73.6%. Everywhere, support fell harder than the average.

## What this means in practice

- An agency placing administrative staff works in a market with 27.6% fewer new vacancies than in 2022. Demand is moving to bookkeepers, financial specialists, and production planners, each of which is growing.
- One in three administrative clerks is 55 or over. Anyone who still needs these roles must replace what leaves over the next five years, from an inflow that shrinks every year. Plan the succession now.
- For candidates in clerical roles the route up is concrete: bookkeepers grew 83%, office managers 28%, production planners 36%. The skill that counts is managing the process rather than entering the data.
- HR is the support function where demand outside the Netherlands fell hardest, 65% to 74% below peak. An agency that leans on HR placements should read that as the earliest warning.
- The reorganisations in support services that large employers are now announcing bring experienced administrative staff to the market. They will not land in the same role. They will land with the employers who have already automated the process and need someone who understands it.

## Method and sources

Workers by occupation: CBS StatLine 86320NED, employed labour force aged 15 to 74 by occupation, annual averages 2013 to 2025, both sexes, on the BRC 2014 occupational classification, 2025 edition. The 2025 edition changed only the names of five groups in class 04, not their composition; the predecessor 85276NED gives the same figures. Administrative clerks (0431) include office assistants, postal workers, archive clerks, and personnel administration clerks; secretarial staff (0432) departmental secretaries, minute takers, and data entry clerks; executive and medical secretaries sit with office managers and management assistants (0423). The labour force survey changed its design in 2021; the CBS recomputed 2013 to 2020 at headline level but says figures by occupation can jump between 2020 and 2021. The share aged 55 and over is computed from the same table, age bands 55 to 65 and 65 to 75, over all workers in the group.

Vacancies: CBS StatLine 85081NED, vacancies arising per year by occupation, all industries, 2018 to 2025, provisional, from online vacancy observation; this counts new vacancies in the year, not the open stock. Total open vacancies come from 80472ned. UWV: the tightness indicator for the first quarter of 2026 and the report on tightness by occupation 2024 to 2030 of 18 December 2025. UWV changed its vacancy source on 18 December 2025 and says the older series is no longer usable, so 2022 tightness cannot be compared with 2026.

Europe: Eurostat lfsa_egais, employed persons aged 15 to 64 by ISCO-08 major group, both sexes, 2011 to 2025, for nine geographies, and lfsa_egai2d for the two-digit subgroups. The German subgroups were recoded in 2020 and are not usable across that boundary; only major group 4 is used for Germany here. Every country carries a break in series in 2021; the Netherlands also in 2013. Indeed Hiring Lab, job postings tracker on GitHub, seasonally adjusted index with 1 February 2020 at 100, as of 4 September 2026; the Netherlands carries no breakdown by job category in that data, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom do. Indeed changed its seasonal adjustment in November 2024 and revised the series.

AI: UWV, towards AI that works for everyone (2025), an expert study with an employer survey from 2024; OECD, country note for the Netherlands in Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2024, exposure measured for 2022. DNB, press release of 17 November 2025 and the 2026 supervisory budget, which defines overhead. Press reports on the size of the reorganisations at DNB and at Uber, and a staffing company's remark about administrative roles, are not used as sources here because the organisations themselves have not published those figures or words.

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Occupations, Automation, Replacement demand, Business services, All markets

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**Sources**


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