



372,000 part-timers want more hours, against 297,000 unemployed

It is the only pool an employer can reach without hiring anyone.

Summary

In 2025 the Netherlands counted 372,000 part-timers who want to work more hours, against 297,000 unemployed people. The largest untapped group on the labour market already has a job. Part-timers say they want 2 to 2.5 extra hours a week on average. At a client with twenty part-timers that is more than a full working week, without a single new candidate.

Recruitment almost always starts with people who are not yet employed. Yet the largest untapped group on the Dutch labour market is already on the payroll.

More part-timers than unemployed

In 2025 the Netherlands counted 297,000 unemployed people aged 20 to 64. In the same group there were 372,000 people in part-time work who want more hours.

That is uncomfortable for the way most vacancies are approached. The pool everyone fishes in, the unemployed, is smaller than the pool almost nobody fishes in.

Total labour market slack came to 851,000 people in 2025. The unemployed make up 35% of that. Part-timers wanting more hours make up 44%. The rest are people available but not searching, and people searching but not immediately available.

The Netherlands is an outlier here

As a share of the extended labour force, unused part-time hours come to 4% in the Netherlands. The EU average is 2.3%.

- Finland 4.4%
- Netherlands 4.0%
- France 3.7%
- Belgium 3.6%
- Sweden 3.3%
- Norway 3.1%
- Denmark 2.8%
- Germany 1.2%

The gap with Germany is a factor of three. That follows from roughly half of Dutch workers holding a part-time job, which is exceptional internationally. Where part-time is the norm, unused hours are too.

The reserve is shrinking. It stood at 7.4% in 2015, 4.7% in 2019, 4.1% in 2022 and 4.0% in 2025. The steep fall is over, and what remains barely moves.

How many hours it really is

A correction to the optimism belongs here. Part-timers do not want full-time. Research cited by the Dutch central bank shows they want 2 to 2.5 extra hours a week on average, not fifteen.

Nationally that would lift labour volume by roughly 3 to 4%. That is not a solution to the structural shortage, and it is fair to say so.

At the level of a single employer it looks different. Twenty part-timers each working 2.5 extra hours a week produce 50 hours between them. That is more than a full working week, from people who already know the work, with no recruitment cost and no ramp-up.

Why it does not happen anyway

If it were this easy it would already be done. Three things stand in the way.

- **Nobody asks.** Hours are set at hire and rarely revisited. Someone who signed for 24 hours three years ago because the children were small has never been asked whether that still holds.
- **It does not always pay.** At certain income levels and benefit thresholds, a few extra hours add little after tax. That is a real objection, not a motivation problem.
- **The shifts do not fit.** Extra hours have to land at times that suit caring responsibilities and commuting. An employer offering only whole days gets nothing.

What an agency does with this

- **Ask at the intake.** Before searching: how many part-timers work here, and when was their contract size last discussed? Almost no competitor has that conversation.
- **Convert it into full-time equivalents.** Twenty part-timers times 2.5 hours is more than one role. Set that beside the fee for a placement and the comparison makes itself.
- **Offer it as a first step, not an alternative.** It does not fill the vacancy. It relieves pressure while the search runs, and it gives the client something in week one rather than week eight.
- **Use it where recruitment is stuck.** In markets where you demonstrably cannot find anyone, this is the only honest answer that is not an empty promise.

Method and sources

Figures on unemployment, unused part-time hours and total slack come from Eurostat, dataset `lfsi_sla_a`, ages 20 to 64, reference year 2025. Counts are in persons and shares are a percentage of the extended labour force.

The finding that part-timers want 2 to 2.5 extra hours a week on average comes from research cited in the DNB analysis of labour scarcity of February 2024. That publication is under copyright and is summarised here, not reproduced.

Shortage, All markets

Sources

- Eurostat (`lfsi_sla_a`), CC BY 4.0
- DNB Analyse, Arbeidsmarktkrapte: het nieuwe normaal?, februari 2024
- CBS StatLine, CC BY 4.0