IPMERC Research

The shortage has a job title

Ask a Dutch employer which vacancy is hardest to fill and the answer, twice as often as any care profession, is a technical one. The labour market is cooling. Technical occupations barely notice.

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Summary

When Dutch employers were asked in autumn 2025 to name their hardest vacancy, 27% named a technical occupation: fitters, welders, CNC operators, machinists, and engineers. Care and welfare professions followed at 13%. In construction, 71% of vacancies arising over the past 12 months were hard to fill; in manufacturing, 53%. The vacancy rate in the fourth quarter of 2025 stood at 7.0% in construction, 5.0% in professional and technical services, and 4.8% in ICT, against 3.9% for the economy as a whole. The overall market is loosening, the share of hard-to-fill vacancies fell from 53% in 2023 to 45% in 2025, but that is largely an office-job story. In Germany, the ICT vacancy rate dropped to 2.5%. The Dutch technical shortage is not a European inevitability. It is a Dutch profile.

The figure

In autumn 2025, UWV asked 3,551 Dutch employers which occupation was hardest to fill at their site. 27% named a technical one: fitters, welders, milling and lathe operators, CNC operators, carpenters, bricklayers, and engineers. Care and welfare professions followed at 13%, administrative and financial occupations at 11%.

Shortages are usually described by sector. This figure shows the problem is first of all occupational. The fitter does not top one sector's list. Employers in construction, manufacturing, transport, retail, and wholesale each name fitters among their hardest vacancies.

What the numbers say

In construction, 71% of vacancies arising in the past 12 months were hard to fill, according to employers. Two years earlier it was 65%, making construction the only sector where the share rose. Manufacturing follows at 53%, information and communication at 47%. The average across all sectors is 45%.

Vacancy rates confirm the picture. In the fourth quarter of 2025, construction had 7.0 open vacancies per 100 jobs, professional and technical services, which include engineering and consulting firms, 5.0, and ICT 4.8. The economy-wide figure: 3.9. Compare the same quarter before the pandemic: at the end of 2019, construction stood at 4.8%, professional services at 4.2%, and the whole economy at 3.1%. Construction and professional services remain well above their 2019 level.

Why technical work

Employers with hard-to-fill vacancies in autumn 2025 point first to a lack of applications (87%). Then come candidates without the required skills (64%), the specialist nature of the work (62%), and insufficient professional knowledge (59%). In manufacturing, 62% of employers also say applicants lack the right attitude.

Competition compounds it. 59% of employers with recruitment problems say other employers are fishing in the same pool; in construction, 65% say so. Because the same technical occupations top the list in five sectors at once, that pool is smaller than each sector assumes. UWV expects staffing to remain a long-term challenge in many technical occupations, alongside transport and healthcare roles.

The cooling that skips the workshop

Nationally, the share of hard-to-fill vacancies fell from 58% in 2022 through 53% in 2023 and 2024 to 45% in 2025. That is back at the level of spring 2019.

Within technology, the picture splits. Software occupations are normalising: the share of ICT employers naming staff shortages as a business constraint fell, according to CBS, from 53% in July 2022 to 29% in July 2025, and one in five employers in information and communication expects hiring to get easier in 2026. Physical technology moves the other way: construction rose from 65% to 71% hard to fill, and 27% of construction employers expect next year to be harder still.

Across the border

Germany shows what a cooling market actually looks like. The German vacancy rate stood at 2.8% economy-wide in the fourth quarter of 2025, against 3.9% in the Netherlands. German ICT: 2.5%, against 4.8% in the Netherlands. German manufacturing: 1.8%, against 3.7% here. Only German construction keeps an elevated rate at 4.9%, and even that sits far below the Dutch 7.0%. Belgium, at 4.2% in ICT, is close to the Dutch level.

The Dutch technical shortage, in other words, is not a fixed European condition. Where German demand for technical staff moved with the economic cycle, Dutch demand held nearly flat.

What this means in practice

- Anyone hiring a fitter, machinist, or engineer competes with at least four other sectors, not just their own.
- The claim that the labour market has loosened is true nationally but not for technical occupations. Quote the sector figure, not the average.
- In construction, tightness rose rather than fell over two years, from 65% to 71% hard to fill.
- For software roles the picture has turned: the ICT vacancy rate nearly halved from its early 2022 peak (8.4% in the first quarter of 2022, 4.8% at the end of 2025).

Method and sources

The occupational and sector figures on hard-to-fill vacancies come from the UWV employer survey of autumn 2025 (Daling moeilijk vervulbare vacatures, February 2026). Fieldwork by Desan, 15 September through 12 December 2025, net response 3,551 establishments, weighted by sector and size class. Agriculture and employment agencies were excluded. The figures measure employers' own assessment, not objective vacancy duration.

The measures and expectations come from the companion publication of the same survey (Krapte op de arbeidsmarkt: wat werkgevers doen om personeel te werven, February 2026). The ICT constraint figure is from CBS (business cycle survey, July 2022 and July 2025), as cited by UWV.

Vacancy rates come from Eurostat dataset jvs_q_nace2, not seasonally adjusted, all enterprise sizes, retrieved August 2026. Like quarters are compared (Q4 2019, Q4 2025) to exclude seasonal effects. No vacancy rate by occupation exists; sector serves as the proxy here. Denmark publishes no vacancy rate and is excluded from the comparison.

Shortage, Engineering, Vacancies, Construction, Industry, IT, All markets

Sources

- UWV, Daling moeilijk vervulbare vacatures (februari 2026), Overname toegestaan met bronvermelding
- UWV, Krapte op de arbeidsmarkt: wat werkgevers doen om personeel te werven (februari 2026), Overname toegestaan met bronvermelding
- Eurostat, jvs_q_nace2 (vacaturegraad per sector, kwartaal), CC BY 4.0