



# **Employment of persons with disabilities: an assessment of the effectiveness of national policies**

Netherlands

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# **Employment of persons with disabilities: an assessment of the effectiveness of national policies**

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## **1 Executive summary**

### **1.1 Analysis of the employment situation of persons with disabilities, including the disability employment gap**

In 2012, the employment rate for the general population in the Netherlands was 76.6 %, and by 2022 it had increased to 82.9 %. Labour force participation in 2022 was higher among men, at 86.9 %, than among women, at 79 %. The increase in employment is due to the tightening of the Dutch labour market; as of 2021, job vacancies overtook the number of those unemployed.

The employment gap has decreased for men with disabilities, from 32.3 % in 2014 to 22 % in 2023. However, the gap for women with disabilities increased from 25.5 % to 26.3 % in the same period. Labour force participation among specific groups of persons entitled to benefits hovers around 50 %. For those in receipt of full benefits and for persons with intellectual disabilities, participation rates are much lower, at 9.8 % and 13 % respectively. The total number of places in sheltered employment decreased strongly, from 102 124 jobs in 2012 to 68 900 in 2023.

### **1.2 National targets for the employment of persons with disabilities, including monitoring of the targets**

Targets are set for jobs to be created for specific groups of persons with disabilities, mostly those who acquired impairments before their 18th birthday. There is no target set for monitoring of the labour force participation rate for persons with disabilities in general.

### **1.3 Identification and evaluation of employment measures over the last decade**

One employment measure has been a package of tighter eligibility criteria for young persons with disabilities, in combination with a gradual closing down of sheltered workshops, and the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme to create jobs for specific target groups: targets of 125 000 jobs through a job agreement and 30 000 jobs in sheltered employment to be reached in 2025 and 2045 respectively. Targets are not met, and sanctions are not imposed. Half of the jobs based on the Job Agreement and in sheltered employment are on a temporary basis, and all wages in these jobs are at or below the minimum level. Only 14.7 % of employers hire persons with a disability (benefit).

The second measure is the provision of subsidies for employers (wage subsidies, financing job coaches) and individual reintegration provisions, such as laptops and special transport. Most of the provisions are exclusively aimed at and issued to workers who earn less than the minimum wage, which is the target group of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. Employers find the provision of subsidies and provisions essential in hiring workers with a disability, but at the same time so complicated that they refrain from using them.

The third measure is the legal obligation, since 2005, on all employers to pay wages to employees during the first two years of absence due to illness or disability combined with a legal obligation to offer reintegration within the company. The employee can apply for a disability benefit after two years of the onset of the disability, and will receive

further reintegration support offered by the national authority UWV if the employee is assessed as having some capacity to earn part of their former wage. The social security charge for employers will automatically increase for five years when one or more of their employees has applied for a disability benefit.

The factors that most influence labour force participation rates concern the general developments that occur in the labour market (which is very tight in the Netherlands) and economic growth. There are some visible effects of the three measures described above, but there are also negative effects for certain groups, with persons with intellectual disability in particular losing out. There are also indications that women with disabilities benefit less from reintegration support.

The three measures are not well evaluated in relation to the general participation rate. Labour force participation rates among specific groups of benefit recipients who are eligible for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and wage subsidies have increased, but the participation rate hovers around 50 %, well below the participation rate for persons with disabilities as measured using European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data. Higher participation rates do not correspond with a decrease in dependency on disability benefits. The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and wage subsidies both focus exclusively on workers who are low skilled and may not earn more than the minimum wage. As a result of that focus, half a million persons with disabilities cannot profit from these measures. There are no incentives to develop a more inclusive labour market for more highly skilled workers with disabilities.

#### **1.4 Future plans and overall assessment**

No concrete plans are reported for future actions, other than simplifying reintegration support and the provision of a somewhat larger budget for wage subsidies. Given the tightness of the labour market, the Government has announced that it will investigate how to tap into unused labour potential, but there was almost no reference to persons with disabilities in this announcement.

There is no overall evaluation of the three important measures as described in this report. Monitoring is aimed at specific groups of benefit recipients only. The focus of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and wage subsidies on low-skilled, low-productivity jobs that are paid at below the minimum wage is not generally questioned. There is no awareness among policy makers of the need to stimulate a more inclusive labour market that includes all persons with disabilities.

#### **1.5 Recommendations on effective target setting and monitoring**

Set up a target for increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities and reduce the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities. Current policy efforts focus on a relatively small group of persons with disabilities, where some progress has been noted. However, this approach overlooks the broader reality that the overall employment rate for all persons with disabilities is not improving.

Collect and analyse data – disaggregated by type of disability, age and gender – on the labour force participation of all groups of persons with disabilities. Adapt policies to ensure that different groups receive equal support adapted to their needs.

Broaden the scope of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, plus financial incentives such as wage subsidies, to include work that pays more than just the minimum wage. Provide subsidies also for workers who have the potential for higher productivity.

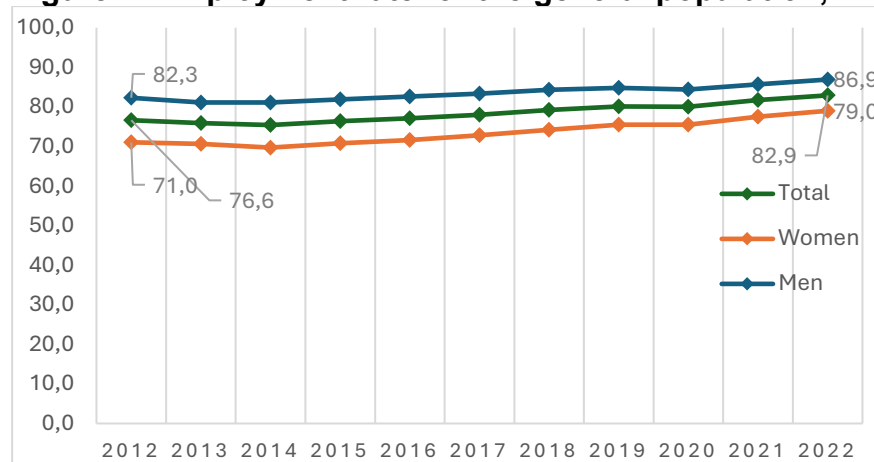
Analyse how a more inclusive labour market, including technological innovation, could be a solution to workforce shortages in all types of sectors. Take a step beyond focusing on adaptations for individual jobs, and stimulate changes in general labour conditions such that persons with disabilities can more easily fit in.

## 2 Analysis of the employment situation of persons with disabilities, including the disability employment gap

### 2.1 Overall employment rate and trends

In 2012, the employment rate for the general population in the Netherlands was 76.6 %; it decreased slightly to 75.4 % in 2014, and from then on, it increased annually, reaching 82.9 % in 2022. Labour force participation is higher among men than women: in 2022, the rate was 86.9 % for men and 79 % for women.

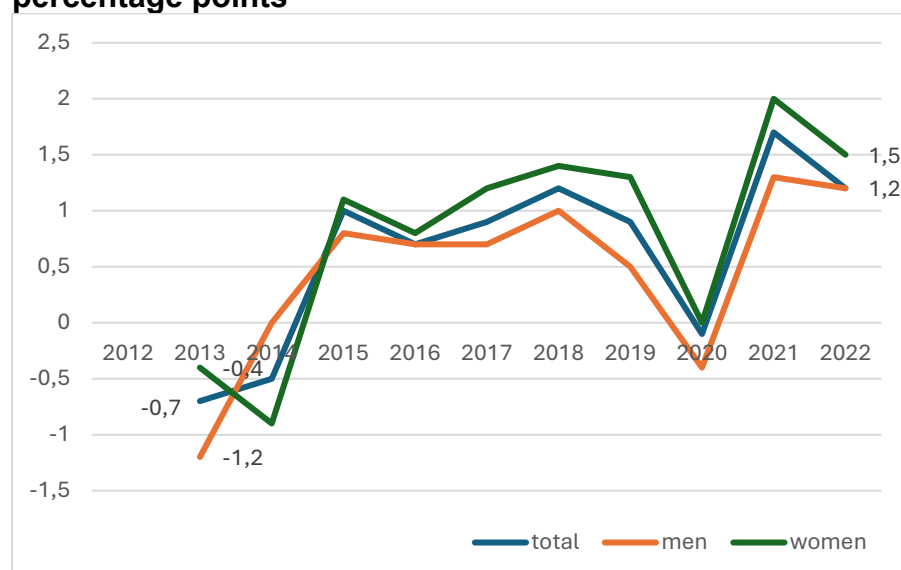
**Figure 1: Employment rate for the general population, in percentage**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

However, women are catching up. The increase in labour force participation among the general population was higher for women than for men during most years in the period 2012-2022. The graph shows the annual change in labour force participation in percentage points.

**Figure 2: Annual change of labour force participation of general population, in percentage points**

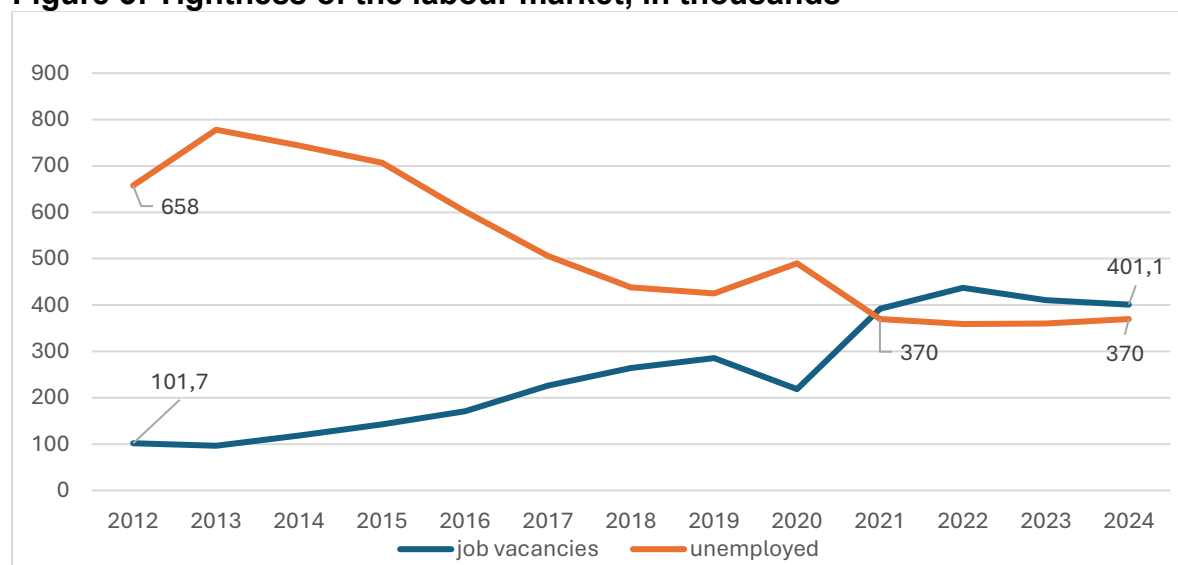


Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

The difference between men and women varies according to age group. In 2024, labour force participation was equal between men and women among young people up to 25 years of age. The gap in participation between men and women increases in each higher age group: from 5 percentage points in the 25-35 age group to 11.7 percentage points in the 55-65 age group.<sup>1</sup>

The Dutch labour market has been tightening since 2013. Job vacancies have increased annually, with a dip during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as of 2021, the number of vacancies overtook the number of those unemployed. As of 2024, the number of job vacancies is higher than the number of persons unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3: Tightness of the labour market, in thousands**



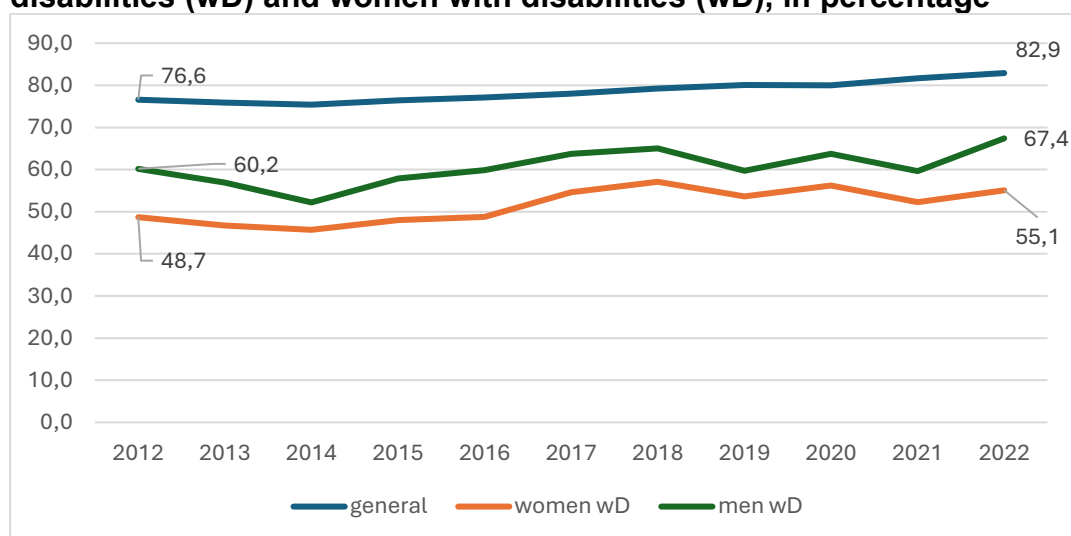
Source: Netherlands Statistics. numbers x 1000

## 2.2 Description of the employment rate of persons with disabilities and trends

Labour force participation among men with disabilities was 60.2 % in 2012, increasing to 67.4 % in 2022. In 2012, labour force participation among women with disabilities was 48.7 %, increasing to 55.1 % in 2022. Labour force participation among persons with disabilities thus roughly follows the trend of an increase in labour force participation in the general population. Contrary to the trend in the general population, however, the participation rate for men with disabilities increased more than the rate for women with disabilities between 2012 and 2022.

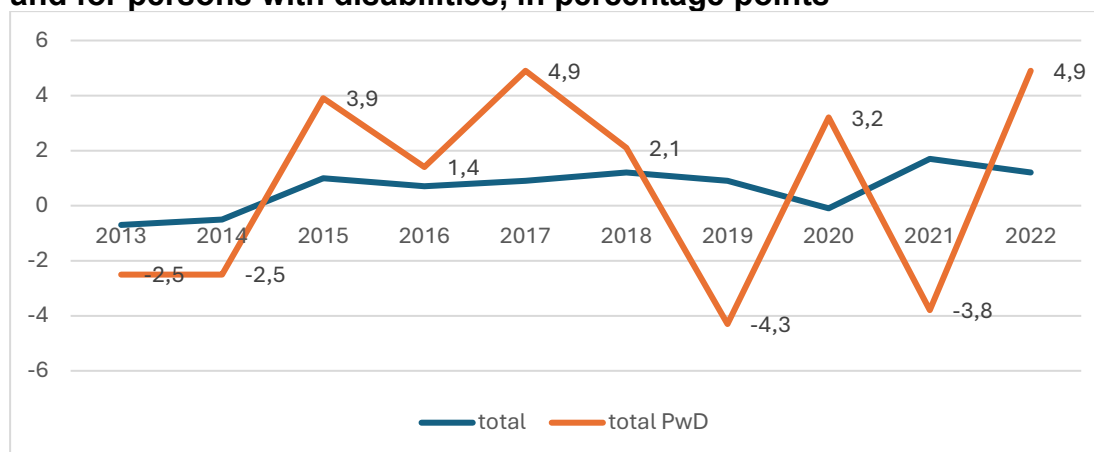
<sup>1</sup> Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek – CBS), 'Arbeidsparticipatie naar leeftijd en geslacht' (Labour participation according to age and sex), data for second quarter of 2024. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-arbeidsmarkt/werkenden/arbeidsparticipatie-naar-leeftijd-en-geslacht>.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Netherlands, 'Vacatures' (Job vacancies), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/80474ned/table?ts=1724839053406> and 'Werkloze beroepsbevolking' (Unemployed), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/80590ned/table?dl=1A71D>.

**Figure 4: Labour participation rate for the general population, men with disabilities (wD) and women with disabilities (wD), in percentage**

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

Annual changes in labour force participation involved stronger fluctuations for persons with disabilities than for the general population. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a slight decrease (0.1 pp.) in labour force participation in 2020 for the general population, but more so for men and women with disabilities in 2019 (-4.3 pp.) and 2021 (-3.8 pp.). The following graphic shows the fluctuation in percentage points per year for the general population and for persons with disabilities.

**Figure 5: Annual change of labour participation per year for general population and for persons with disabilities, in percentage points**

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

Overall: labour force participation has increased since 2012 for both the general population and for persons with disabilities, but there are stronger fluctuations in participation rates for persons with disabilities. Labour force participation for women in general has increased the most. The rate for men with disabilities has followed suit, as has the rate for men in general, while women with disabilities lag behind in labour force participation.

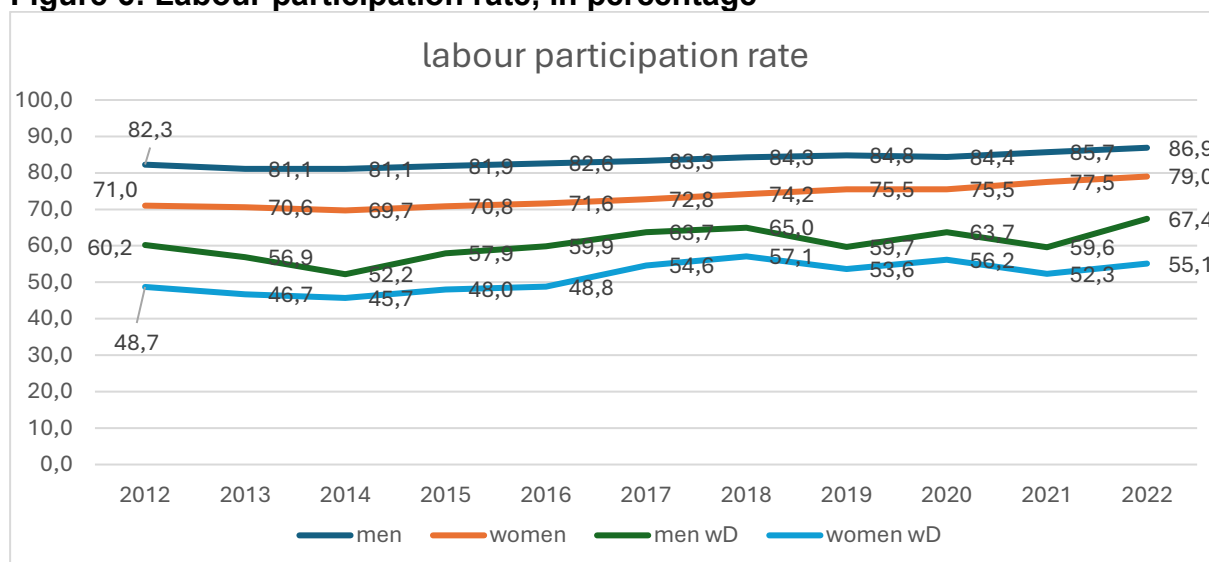
The tightness of the labour market has contributed to increased participation. In 2015, the general Job Agreement and Quota Scheme began, aiming to create 125 000 jobs over a period of 10 years for persons with a disability. Labour force participation for

people assessed as eligible for this Job Agreement and Quota Scheme has increased, compared with the situation before 2015.

The majority of people who are eligible for these reserved jobs are men (61 %).<sup>3</sup> Among the eligible group, men are more often successful in actually acquiring such a job: 55 % of men compared with 47 % of women. The main eligibility criteria are: to have acquired a disability before one's 18th birthday and to be assessed as having an earning capacity below the minimum wage.

Women are overrepresented in the groups that receive an employee-related benefit (60 %). Recipients of employee-related benefits do not receive support under the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme seems to have contributed to increased labour force participation of men with disabilities in particular. It has been established that it is men, more often than women, who receive reintegration support.<sup>4</sup> This might account for women with disabilities lagging behind in labour force participation.

**Figure 6: Labour participation rate, in percentage**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

## 2.3 Description of the disability employment gap and trends

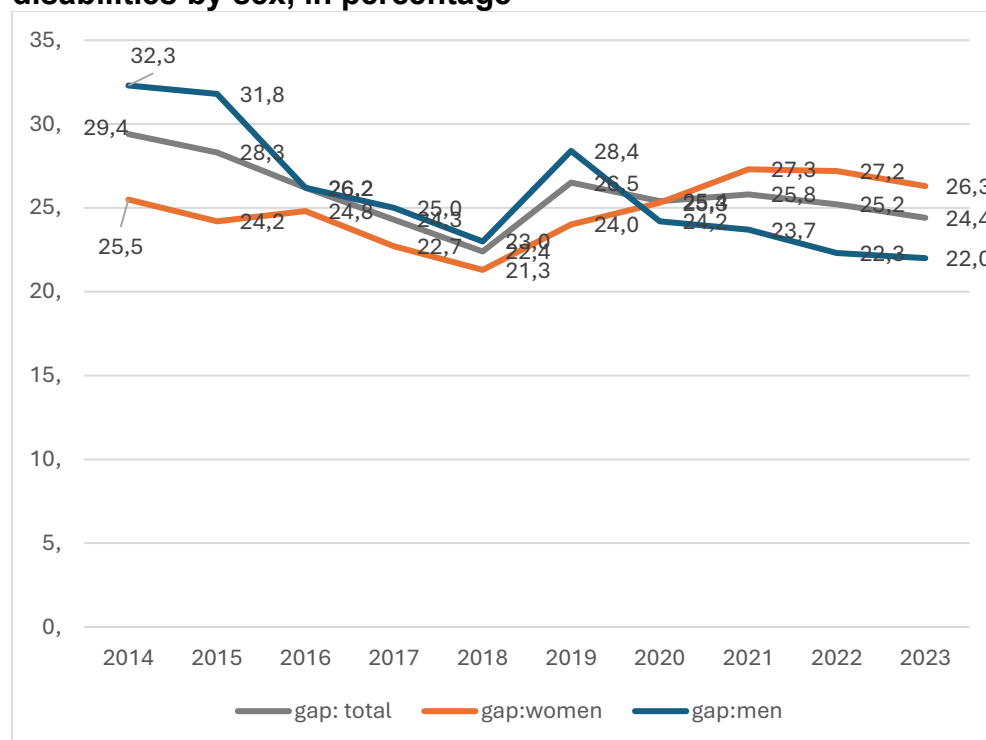
In 2012, the employment gap between the general population and persons with disabilities was 29.4 %; in 2022, it had decreased to 24.4 %. The gap decreased strongly for men with disabilities, falling from 32.3 % in 2014 to 22 % in 2023. However, the gap for women with disabilities increased in the same period, from 25.5 % to 26.3 %.

<sup>3</sup> UWV, 'UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2023', 8 February 2024, <https://www.uwv.nl/nl/publicaties/kennis/2024/uwv-monitor-arbeidsparticipatie-arbeidsbeperkten-2023>.

<sup>4</sup> Association of Directors of Social Services (Divosa), 'Man-vrouw verschillen bij inzet voorzieningen Participatiewet' (Male-female differences in the use of the provisions of the Participation Act), July 2024, <https://www.divosa.nl/publicaties/man-vrouwverschillen-bij-inzet-voorzieningen-participatiewet>.

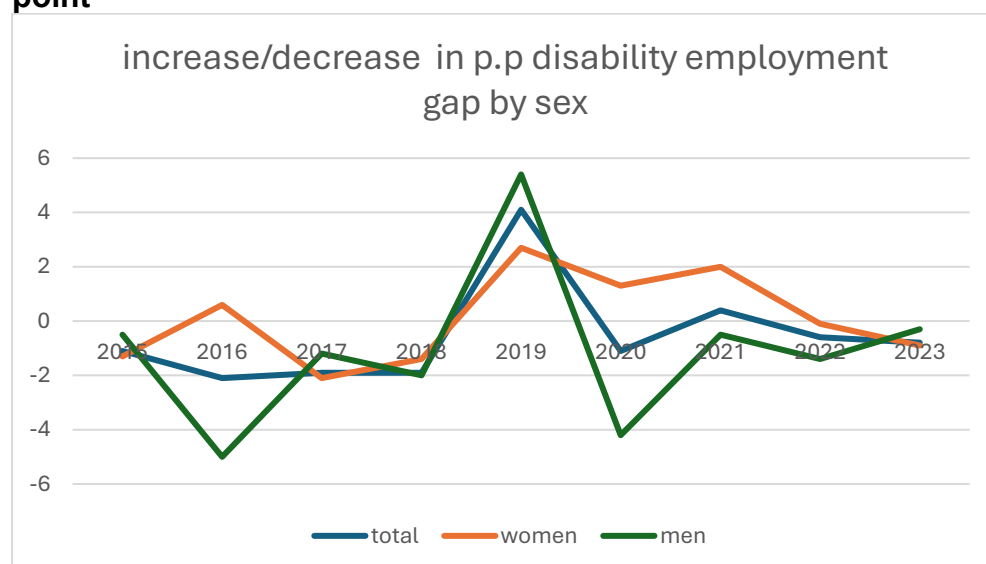
This widening gap for women is due to the fact that labour force participation for women in general has increased more strongly in the Netherlands since 2012 (while participation among women with disabilities lags behind). There are strong yearly fluctuations in the employment gap, more so for men than for women.

**Figure 7: Employment gap between general population and persons with disabilities by sex, in percentage**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

**Figure 8: annual change in the disability employment gap by sex, in percentage point**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC

## 2.4 Employment of persons with disabilities in ‘sheltered workshops’

In 2012, there were 102 124 persons working in sheltered workshops; a further 21 078 persons were eligible but were placed on a waiting list. The average waiting time was 22 months in that year. Of all those working in sheltered employment in 2012, 70 % were men and 30 % women; 6 % were younger than 27 years of age, and 63 % were older than 45 years. The majority of men in sheltered workshops worked full time (83 %), whereas only 17 % of women worked full time. Among all workers in the workshops, 31 % had a physical disability, 35 % had an intellectual disability and 31 % had a psychosocial disability.<sup>5</sup>

By 2023, the number of jobs in sheltered workshops had almost halved, to 55 000, of which 38 000 were for men and 18 000 for women, according to data from Statistics Netherlands.<sup>6</sup> According to Cedris, the organisation for companies that run sheltered workshops, the number of jobs in sheltered workshops stood at 59 500 in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

This drastic reduction in number of jobs is the result of the national Government’s policy to close down all inflow into sheltered workshops as of 2015, and to require municipalities to finance and organise a yearly quota of job placements in companies on a secondment basis. These placements are called ‘sheltered jobs’. According to Cedris, the total number of sheltered jobs was 9 400 in 2023. The total number of places in sheltered workshops and in sheltered jobs thus stands at 68 900 in comparison with 102 124 in 2012, which shows a sharp decrease in sheltered employment.

Cedris does not provide disaggregated data for men and women, nor for age groups.

## 2.5 Additional national indicators / data regarding employment of persons with disabilities

There are specific groups of persons with disabilities for whom indicators for labour participation have been established. There are two groups to highlight in this regard: 1: persons who self-identify as having a functional limitation; and 2: persons who have applied for a disability benefit via the administrative authority UWV. Aside from these two groups, there are persons with disabilities who are not registered as such because they receive no disability benefit. This third group is estimated at around 500 000.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the first group, the Netherlands has no national census, so Statistics Netherlands gathers data from surveys conducted in which a sample of inhabitants are requested to fill in online forms. One of the questions in these surveys is whether a person identifies themselves as having a disability due to a form of incapacity which hinders them in their daily functioning, including work. These surveys, and the level of

<sup>5</sup> Panteia (independent research agency), ‘WSW statistiek, Jaarrapport 2012’ (Statistical year report), June 2013, <https://app.1848.nl/document/tkapi/443574>.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Netherlands, ‘Werkgelegenheid: geslacht, dienstverband, kenmerken baan, SBI2008’ (Employment: gender, employment, job characteristics), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/81433ned/table?dl=AA851>.

<sup>7</sup> Cedris (2024), *Sectorinformatie 2023* (Sector information 2023), <https://cedris.nl/app/uploads/Cedris-Sectorinformatie-2023.pdf>.

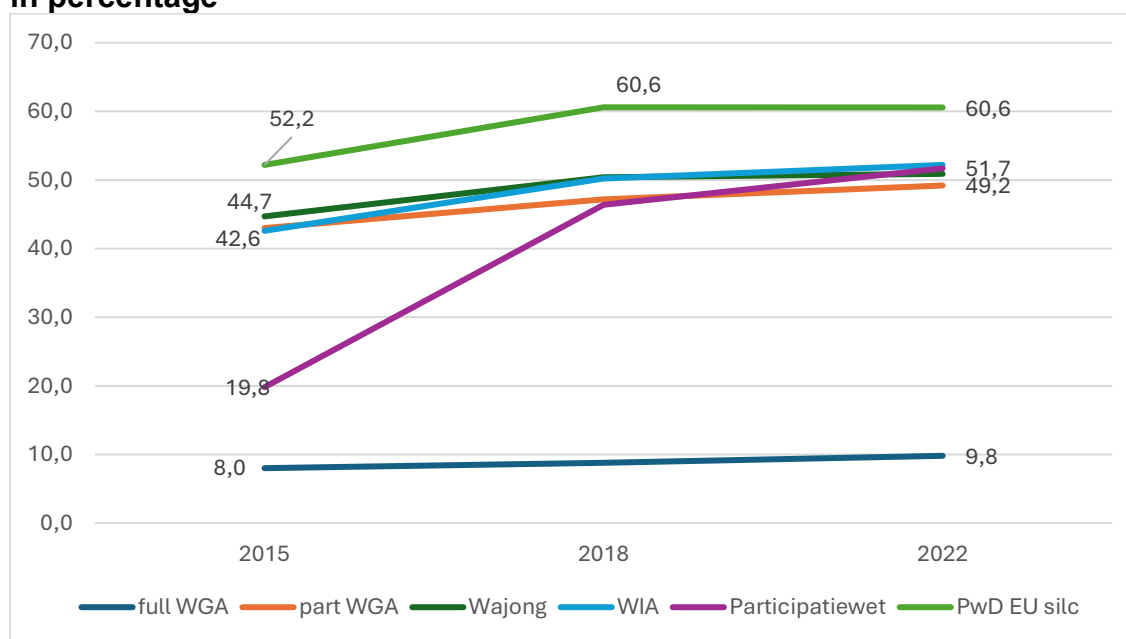
<sup>8</sup> Ieder(in), ‘Radicaal ander beleid nodig om inclusieve arbeidsmarkt te realiseren’ (Radical vision needed to realise inclusive labour market), policy report, April 2021, <https://iederin.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Basisartikel-beleid-voor-een-inclusieve-arbeidsmarkt.pdf>.

self-identification as having a disability, serve as the basis for Dutch EU-SILC data. Hence, the labour force participation rate as mentioned in above the paragraphs is the rate for persons who identify themselves as having a disability.

The second main group consists of persons who have applied for an assessment of disability in order to be granted an income replacement disability benefit<sup>9</sup> was 819 600 in 2012 and 851 000 in 2024.<sup>10</sup> According to the administrative authority UWV, a large part of this group – 347 600 persons – is assessed as having theoretical earning capacity and thus is considered able to work either full or part time.<sup>11</sup>

For the groups that are assessed as having the capacity to do paid work, the UWV gives labour force participation rates in 2023 as follows: 9.8 % for those with an employee-related full benefit; 49.2 % with a partial employee-related disability benefit; and 50.9 % for those who acquired a disability at a young age and were assessed as having partial capacity to earn a wage.<sup>12</sup> The UWV identifies further two groups of people (a total of 192 450 persons) with a formally assessed disability (based on the WIA and the Participation Act)<sup>13</sup> but without a disability benefit because they have some earning capacity. Labour force participation in these two groups was 52.2 % and 51.7 % in 2023. For all groups concerned, labour participation lags behind the participation rate provided for persons with disabilities, which is based on EU-SILC data.

**Figure 9: Labour force participation rates (EU SILC) per type of benefit receiver, in percentage**



<sup>9</sup> These benefits are based on the acts WAO, Wajong, WAZ or WIA.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Netherlands, 'Sociale zekerheid, uitkeringen naar uitkeringssoort' (Social security, benefits by benefit type).

<sup>11</sup> UWV, 'UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2023', February 2024, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> UWV, 'UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2023', February 2024, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Participation Act 2015 (*Participatiewet 2015*), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2024-07-01>.

In 2023, the labour force participation rate for WGA employee-related benefits was almost equal for men and women. The participation rate among young persons with a disability receiving the Wajong benefit is higher among men (29.9 %) than among women (20.4 %).<sup>14</sup>

Persons who acquire a disability at a young age can apply for the Wajong disability benefit. Before 2015, young persons could be assessed as having a partial or full disability (meaning they had lost the capacity to earn part or full minimum wage). After 2015, the Wajong benefit was closed to young persons who were assessed as having partial earning capacity. They could apply for the unemployment benefit based on the Participation Act. The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme were aimed at helping in particular these young workers with partial earning capacity into a paid job. This accounts for the increase in labour force participation, from 19.8 % in 2015 to over 50 % in 2022, as shown in the above graph, for this group. The graph shows the inflow in jobs based on the Job Agreement.

The third group, which comprises persons who have a disability but who are not registered as such because they receive no disability benefit, is estimated at around 500 000 persons. The national advocacy organisation for persons with disability, *Ieder(in)*, estimates that 1.7 million inhabitants of the Netherlands have a disability, of whom 1 155 000 receive a benefit or are registered for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme.<sup>15</sup> Around 500 000 have no (neither disability nor unemployment) benefits and are not entitled to participate in the Job Agreement Scheme nor any other kind of reintegration support. Among this group could be, for instance, self-employed persons who are not eligible for a disability benefit. It is unknown how many among this group have paid work.<sup>16</sup> They are, as *Ieder(in)* puts it, literally out of sight, as neither the UWV nor Statistics Netherlands monitors this particular group.<sup>17</sup>

Persons who have a disability but are not entitled to a disability benefit may apply for an unemployment benefit under the Participation Act if there is no other income in their household. Municipalities are responsible for providing benefits and reintegration support under the Participation Act. In 2024, the number of persons receiving a benefit under the Participation Act was 395 000.<sup>18</sup> Around half of them were reported to have serious health problems, resulting in their being unable to perform all daily activities and in need of social support.<sup>19</sup> A total of 17 % of recipients of this benefit are formally exempted by municipalities from the duty to seek paid work because they are considered to be too ill or to have a too high degree of disability to work. Although more women (53 %) than men (47 %) receive a participation benefit, it is men, more often than women, who get reintegration support to seek paid work (49 % and 41 % respectively).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Extra additional data provided by the UWV upon request.

<sup>15</sup> *Ieder(in)*, April 2021.

<sup>16</sup> *Ieder(in)*, April 2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Ieder(in)*, April 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Statistics Netherlands, '*Sociale zekerheid; kerncijfers, uitkeringen naar uitkeringssoort*' (Social security; key figures, benefits by benefit type), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37789ksz/table?ts=1724922564541>.

<sup>19</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau – SCP*) (2023), *Een brede blik op bijstand* (A broad view on social assistance), p. 24, <https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2023/06/09/een-brede-blik-op-bijstand>.

<sup>20</sup> Divosa, July 2024.

The one survey in which this group might be represented is the ongoing participation monitor by the independent research agency Nivel. The agency's participation monitors are based on interviewing panels of persons with physical and intellectual disabilities regardless of their status as benefit recipients. The Nivel monitor for 2022 found that among men with physical disabilities, 46 % had paid work, as did 41 % of women with physical disabilities.<sup>21</sup> Among persons with an intellectual disability, 13 % had paid work (19 % men and 8 % of women with intellectual disabilities; 64 % of men and 78 % of women with intellectual disabilities have unpaid daycare activities).<sup>22</sup> Nivel found that there was a decrease in paid and unpaid work for persons with intellectual disabilities between 2016 and 2019.<sup>23</sup>

A monitoring report by the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (with input from Statistics Netherlands and the research agency Nivel using panel data) on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) notes there is much untapped labour potential among persons with disabilities, regardless of whether or not they receive a benefit.<sup>24</sup> The report states: 'most persons with a disability that are not employed would like to work'. Nivel estimated in 2018 that one third of persons with disabilities without a job would like to have paid work and expressed their need for (more) reintegration support.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nivel, '*Participatiemonitor 2022*' (Participation monitor: key figures 2022), December 2023, <https://www.nivel.nl/nl/publicatie/participatiemonitor-kerncijfers-2022>.

<sup>22</sup> Nivel, '*Participatiemonitor 2022*', December 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Nivel (2020), *Monitoring Onbeperkt Meedoen* (Monitor on participation and the implementation of the CRPD), <https://www.nivel.nl/sites/default/files/bestanden/1003884.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, *Inzicht in inclusie III* (Insight in Inclusion III), February 2022 (the data on persons not employed but willing to work is derived from persons with a physical and mental disability and persons with a chronic illness), <https://publicaties.mensenrechten.nl/publicatie/48a73d44-f079-450c-9487-e100984d0b3a>.

<sup>25</sup> Nivel (2018), *Meting indicatoren voor monitoring van het VN-Verdrag voor de rechten van mensen met een handicap: stand van zaken in Nederland 2012-2016* (Indicators for monitoring the UN CRPD, state of play in the Netherlands 2012-2016), <https://www.nivel.nl/nl/publicatie/meting-indicatoren-voor-monitoring-van-het-vn-verdrag-voor-de-rechten-van-mensen-met-een>.

### **3 National targets for the employment of persons with disabilities, including monitoring of the targets**

#### **3.1 National targets for employment of persons with disabilities**

There are no targets set for employment or the labour force participation rate of persons with disabilities. However, there are specific targets set for jobs to be created for specific groups of persons. The first is the target to create jobs for persons with disabilities within the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. This scheme was introduced in 2015; it runs until the end of 2025, when the final target of 125 000 jobs must be met.

The second target is set for sheltered employment. The end target is 30 000 sheltered jobs to be realised before 2048. It should be noted that sheltered workshops are gradually closing down, because all inflow into sheltered workshops was stopped as of 2015. Those who had a job in sheltered workshops before 2015 may keep their job until retirement, but there are no new entrants. The end target of 30 000 jobs has been set with an acceptance that the 100 000 jobs that once existed in sheltered workshops will dwindle to zero in 2055.

#### **3.2 Indicators to monitor the targets**

Jobs under the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme are not registered as such. The indicator for the target is the number of eligible persons who actually have a job. In 2015, a baseline measurement was made of the number of eligible persons already in a job before the Job Agreement started. Those persons (66 000) who were working at that time do not count towards the target of 125 000.<sup>26</sup> The indicator for the target of 30 000 sheltered jobs is the number of persons eligible for such jobs who are actually working in a job.

The administrative authority UWV monitors both targets and publishes information on them on two dashboards, one for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme<sup>27</sup> and one for the target of 30 000 sheltered jobs.<sup>28</sup> The UWV has ample data, as it is the authority that is to assess eligibility for all disability benefits, for most reintegration support provision and for admission to the register of persons eligible for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, along with making assessments of eligibility for sheltered employment and assessments and allocations of wage subsidies and support measures for employers. Municipalities are to provide data on the target for sheltered employment jobs to the UWV and to national Government. Cedris, the association of (municipal) providers of sheltered employment (mostly in the dwindling number of sheltered workshops), also monitors the targets, using data from the UWV.<sup>29</sup>

There is no monitoring of labour force participation rates for persons with disabilities who do not receive benefits.

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<sup>26</sup> UWV, 'Dashboard banenafspraken' (Job appointment dashboard), <https://www.werk.nl/arbeidsmarktinformatie/dashboards/banenafspraken>.

<sup>27</sup> UWV, 'Dashboard banenafspraken' (Job appointment dashboard), <https://www.werk.nl/arbeidsmarktinformatie/dashboards/banenafspraken>.

<sup>28</sup> UWV, 'Dashboard beschut werk' (Sheltered work dashboard), <https://www.werk.nl/arbeidsmarktinformatie/dashboards/beschut-werk>.

<sup>29</sup> Cedris (2024), *Sectorinformatie 2023* (Sector information 2023), <https://cedris.nl/app/uploads/Cedris-Sectorinformatie-2023.pdf>.

### 3.3 Timeline of monitoring

The UWV monitors the targets for jobs based on the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and sheltered employment, and publishes figures for each quarter on dashboards on its website. Each year, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment publishes the targets for each municipality on sheltered jobs.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.4 Evaluation of targets

The targets are evaluated annually by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and are presented to Parliament for debate.<sup>31</sup> The evaluation focuses on whether employers have reached their targets for creating jobs based on the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme (Government employers continuously lag behind) and on whether municipalities are creating enough sheltered jobs to reach the total end target of 30 000. Changes were made to broaden eligibility criteria<sup>32</sup> and subsidies per sheltered job,<sup>33</sup> but the targets themselves have not been changed.

Not much attention is paid to the labour force participation rate within the target groups. No reference is made to the participation rates of target groups in comparison with the general labour participation rate. There is no monitoring of the participation rate of the broader group of persons with disabilities who do not receive a benefit.

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<sup>30</sup> Publications each year in the *Staatscourant* (state journal); for an example from December 2023, see: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2023-35303.html>.

<sup>31</sup> 'Voortgang Banenafpraak Rijk' (Progress on the National Jobs Agreement), letter to Parliament, December 2023, [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2023Z20667&did=2023D50690](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2023Z20667&did=2023D50690).

<sup>32</sup> Jobs Agreement Bill (*Wetsvoorstel Banenafpraak*), October 2023, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/wetsvoorstellen/detail?cfg=wetsvoorsteldetails&qry=wetsvoorstel%3A36449>.

<sup>33</sup> 'Sociaal ontwikkelbedrijven en beschut werk' (Social development companies and sheltered work), letter to Parliament, July 2023, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2023/07/06/kamerbrief-sociaal-ontwikkelbedrijven-en-beschut-werk>.

## **4 Identification and evaluation of employment measures over the last decade**

### **4.1 Evaluation of national measures**

Three important measures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities are:

- the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, in combination with the target for sheltered jobs;
- providing (wage) subsidies and a range of reintegration provisions; and
- a legal obligation on all employers to pay wages to employees during the first two years of absence due to illness or disability, in combination with an obligation to offer reintegration within the company.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.1.1 Measure 1: Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and sheltered employment and the shift from disability benefits to unemployment benefits**

The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme was introduced in 2015 and will run until the end of 2025. It was combined with tighter eligibility criteria for young workers with the Wajong disability benefit, and also combined with a new set up for sheltered employment. The core idea was to decrease inflow into the Wajong disability benefit for persons who acquired impairments before their 18th birthday, by declaring that only 'fully disabled', and no longer 'partially disabled', persons would be entitled to the benefit; to close down inflow into sheltered workshops and to offer young persons with a disability, and persons eligible for sheltered employment, jobs under the Job Agreement or sheltered jobs.

Yearly targets are set for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. The final target for 2025 is 125 000 jobs, of which 100 000 are to be created within companies and 25 000 within the Government sector. If the targets are not met, quotas and punitive charges are to be imposed, not on individual companies but on industries or the Government sector as a whole.

Jobs based on this agreement are offered to persons with disabilities who are declared to be eligible. Eligibility criteria are: persons who are assessed as having a disability and having some earning capacity, but who are considered to earn at most minimum wage level.<sup>35</sup> Assessment as having a disability is based on an assessment not of functional limitations, but of theoretical wage-earning capacity.

During 2021, private employers offered 74 031 jobs within the Job Agreement, which is almost 6 000 below the target of 80 000 for 2023. Government employers are lagging further behind, offering 11 634 jobs in 2021 where 25 000 should have been realised. Since the scheme began, the Government sector has never met the yearly target.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Based on the Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005 (*Wet werk en inkomen naar arbeidsvermogen*), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0019057/2024-01-01>.

<sup>35</sup> Criteria described on the UWV website: <https://www.uwv.nl/particulieren/overige-onderwerpen/doelgroepregister/detail/wanneer-word-ik-opgenomen-in-het-doelgroepregister>.

<sup>36</sup> 'Brief Resultaten banenafspraak 2023' (Results of the job agreement and quota system), letter to Parliament, July 2024, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2024/07/16/kamerbrief-resultaten-banenafspraak-2023>.

Quota are imposed, but punitive charges on Government employers are suspended, due to a decision by the Parliament in 2020.<sup>37</sup>

The majority of jobs within the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme for workers with disabilities offer a net disposable income at or below disability benefit level.<sup>38</sup> Of all jobs offered under the agreement, 48 % are on a temporary basis.<sup>39</sup> In comparison, 36 % of all workers in the Dutch labour market are working on temporary contracts, on-call contracts or self-employed contracts.

In the Dutch system, sheltered employment is divided into two sectors. Until 2015, sheltered employment was organised in workshops, offered by municipally governed companies. As of 2015, all inflow into these workshops was stopped. Those who had a job in a workshop as at the end of 2014 can retain their job until retirement. From 2015 on, all persons who will be assessed as eligible for sheltered employment are to be offered adapted jobs within regular companies in what are called 'sheltered jobs'. A yearly target has been set for all municipalities to create these sheltered jobs. The overall target is 30 000 sheltered jobs to be created by 2045. Persons eligible for sheltered jobs are automatically eligible for the Job Agreement scheme as well and may apply for a job based on that scheme. The main difference is that for persons eligible for sheltered employment, employers receive higher wage subsidies and other provisions.

The target of 30 000 sheltered jobs has been set, while it is accepted that the existing 102 000 jobs in workshops will dwindle to zero by 2055. The assumption was that a large number of the jobs under the Job Agreement would serve as a replacement for the jobs in the sheltered workshops. The combined end target is thus 125 000 plus 30 000: 155 000 jobs for workers with a disability and earning capacity below the minimum wage.

Since 2015, the number of jobs in sheltered workshops has almost halved, to 55 000 in 2023. The number of new sheltered jobs created (towards the target of 30 000) was 9 400 in 2023. This was well below the target of 10 300 jobs for that year.<sup>40</sup> There is no sanction for not meeting the target. National Government funds the municipalities for every sheltered job they create; however, according to Cedris, the association of municipal providers of sheltered workshops, every job has a funding shortfall of EUR 10 000.<sup>41</sup>

According to Cedris, the 'loss' in jobs in workshops between 2015 and 2023 can be calculated at around 43 000 jobs. The increase in jobs under the Job Agreement in the

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<sup>37</sup> Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Letter to Parliament, *Kamerstukken kst-34352*, No. 219, July 2021, <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-34352-219>.

<sup>38</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019), *Eindevaluatie Participatiewet* (End report evaluation of the Participation Act), SCP publication 2019-17, <https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2019/11/19/eindevaluatie-van-de-participatiewet>.

<sup>39</sup> 'Resultaten onderzoeken banenafpraak en cijfers beschut werk' (Results on the job agreement and figures for sheltered work), letter to Parliament, December 2020, available in Dutch at <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/12/18/resultaten-onderzoeken-banenafpraak-en-cijfers-beschut-werk>.

<sup>40</sup> Cedris (2024), *Sectorinformatie 2023* (Sector information 2023), <https://cedris.nl/app/uploads/Cedris-Sectorinformatie-2023.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Web publication by Cedris based on the research report by Berenschot (2023), *Infrastructuur sociaal ontwikkelbedrijven* (Infrastructure of social development companies), <https://cedris.nl/nieuws/kwetsbare-werkzoekende-wordt-dupe-van-krimp-sociale-infrastructuur/>.

same period was 72 500. The positive ‘net’ result is thus 29 500 jobs in 2023 for workers with a disability assessed as eligible for sheltered employment.<sup>42</sup> These workers will have to compete with the wider group of persons who are eligible for the Job Agreement.

A small minority of employers are willing to offer jobs within the Job Agreement scheme. Of all employers, 61 % state that they are willing to hire someone with a disability, but only 19 % make concrete plans to do so. Less than a quarter of the 19 % of employers who make such plans succeed in hiring an employee with a disability.<sup>43</sup> This minority group of (large) employers succeeds in hiring enough workers with a disability to fulfil the quota for their sector. Among employers who hire workers with a disability, there is a high level of take-up of the financial instruments available. UWV reports that, for 55 % of workers who participate in the Job Agreement scheme, a wage subsidy was given to their employers.<sup>44</sup> Other financial instruments are available on top of the wage subsidy (see Section 4.1.2.).

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research found that jobs within the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, and sheltered jobs, are in large part, and increasingly, offered on a temporary contract (48 %) with low pay, and not all workers with a disability are entitled to an additional disability benefit. The majority of workers with a disability in these jobs do not succeed in finding enough paid work, and run a high risk of missing out on an adequate minimum income level.<sup>45</sup>

A few years after the introduction of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, employers complained that they could not find enough eligible persons who could meet job specifications. Employers offer existing job vacancies to persons with disabilities and do not consider changing general working conditions within their company in order to accommodate workers with disabilities. Furthermore, employers are not in the habit of using instruments such as ‘job carving’ to create new jobs that might be suitable for persons with severe disabilities.<sup>46</sup>

In reaction to these employers’ complaints, the national Government decided to broaden the eligibility criteria. One of the measures was to declare all students leaving secondary special education as eligible to register for the Job Agreement. The number of persons eligible for the Job Agreement thus increased to 268 061 in 2024.<sup>47</sup> That is twice the target for the number of jobs within the agreement. It provides employers with a larger pond to fish in, and enables them to more easily meet the target of jobs to be offer. It also means that the labour force participation rate within this group cannot rise above 50 %.

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research has evaluated the legislative changes of 2015. One of its conclusions was that an individual’s chance of being offered a job

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<sup>42</sup> Calculations made by Cedris on request by author of this report.

<sup>43</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>44</sup> UWV, ‘UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2021’ (Monitoring of labour participation of workers with a disability), <https://www.uwv.nl/nl/publicaties/kennis/2022/uwv-monitor-arbeidsparticipatie-arbeidsbeperkten-2021>.

<sup>45</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>46</sup> Research cited in Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019): De Beer et al., 2019; Ieder(in), 2019, Fermin, de Looze and Hazelzet, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Called ‘doelgroepregister banenafpraak’ (target group register job agreement).

in sheltered employment had reduced from 55 % in 2013 to 39 % in 2019.<sup>48</sup> There are indications that persons with intellectual disabilities in particular are more often refused for sheltered employment jobs and are being referred more to daycare activities. These daycare activities can be organised within regular companies such as restaurants, agricultural and construction firms.<sup>49</sup> Jobs that are offered on a daycare activity base are not paid (on the contrary, workers are expected to pay a monthly contribution to join) and are not registered as jobs.

Persons with intellectual disabilities are not participating in labour surveys by Statistics Netherlands.<sup>50</sup> Only persons who live in an independent household and who can understand the standard questions in online surveys are involved. The decrease in participation in sheltered employment among persons with intellectual disabilities, and the increase in their referral to unpaid daycare activities, is thus unaccounted for in these surveys.

Neither the UWV nor any other agency publishes information disaggregated by sex, age or type of disability on the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. Since 2012, there have been no data disaggregated by sex or age provided on sheltered employment.

#### **4.1.2 Measure 2: Providing (wage) subsidies and a range of reintegration provisions**

Reintegration provisions are (mostly) based on the Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act (WIA) 2005<sup>51</sup> and are issued by the administrative authority UWV. Individual provisions and work adaptations are granted at the request of individual employees or of employers. These provisions can include individual transport, adapted workplaces, sign language interpreters, laptops and the like. There is no exhaustive list of accommodations that can be provided and funded by the UWV. Theoretically, all accommodations can be financed and provided if the UWV assesses them as reasonable, proportionate and cost effective.

A broad range of instruments are available for employers who are willing to hire workers with a disability. Most of these instruments are based on the Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005, and some are based on the Participation Act. Employers are allowed to pay no wage during trial periods of up to six months, and in some cases for two years; they are allowed to pay less than the minimum wage for specific workers with a disability;<sup>52</sup> there are wage subsidies (up to 70 % of the minimum wage), and they can opt for adaptations in the workplace and free-of-charge assistance by job coaches. Furthermore, a form of tax relief<sup>53</sup> is

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<sup>48</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>49</sup> Examples: provider of residential care to persons with intellectual disabilities, De Hartekamp Groep, offers construction work as daycare activity, together with construction firm Civelse Technieken De Boer bv., [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/de-hartekamp-groep\\_wat-een-mooie-klus-langs-de-weg-van-wijk-activity-7225118030341513216-My1v/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/de-hartekamp-groep_wat-een-mooie-klus-langs-de-weg-van-wijk-activity-7225118030341513216-My1v/); restaurant chain 'Brownies and Downies': <https://www.browniesanddownies.nl/dagbesteding>; care providers with restaurants and shops, Ipse De Bruggen: <https://www.ipsedebruggen.nl/horecalocaties>.

<sup>50</sup> See DOTCOM tool by European Disability Expertise, Netherlands, G2, at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1542&langId=en>.

<sup>51</sup> Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005 (*Wet werk en inkomen naar arbeidsvermogen*), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0019057/2024-01-01>.

<sup>52</sup> Those workers who are receiving a Young Disabled Persons Act (*Wajong*) benefit.

<sup>53</sup> The tax relief is based on the Relief Wages Act (*Wet tegemoetkomingen loondomein*), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0037522/2022-01-01>.

available. A basic condition is that the employee for whom subsidies or tax reliefs are granted is not to earn more than the minimum wage.

In 2023, the number of reintegration provisions such as job coaching, adaptations to laptops, desks or special transport granted by the UWV was 26 842 for individual employees with a disability and 1 298 for employers.<sup>54</sup> Data show that the vast majority of provisions are granted for workers with disability who are working under the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, which means that such provisions are mostly issued for workers who are working below minimum wage level; these provisions usually consist of job coaching.<sup>55</sup> The UWV reports that for 55 % of workers who had a disability before their 18th birthday, a wage subsidy was also given.<sup>56</sup>

In 2023, all the municipalities together granted 33 460 wage subsidies to employers.<sup>57</sup> Municipalities are to pay both wage subsidies and income replacement unemployment benefits out of the same budget. This is why municipalities are hesitant to pay wage subsidies for workers with a disability who are not entitled to a benefit.<sup>58</sup> In such cases, the cost of the wage subsidy is not outweighed by not having to pay a full benefit. This might account for the fact that women are less likely to be offered reintegration support by municipalities, as women who live with a wage-earning partner are not entitled to a benefit.

Employers who hire a person in receipt of a disability benefit or a benefit under the Participation Act, or a person who is eligible for sheltered work, are granted 'no-risk' insurance for these employees. This means that they are not obliged to provide sick pay during the first two years of an illness as they are obliged to do for all other employees.

The system of reintegration support for employers is broad; it is also considered to be complicated and bureaucratic. The majority of employers do not know about the details of support and financial incentives. Employers that do have knowledge of the available instruments (including financial support) find them an essential condition for hiring a worker with a disability.<sup>59</sup>

Almost all financial incentives and instruments for employers are aimed specifically at the group of young people with a disability acquired before their 18th birthday, who are eligible for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme for workers with disabilities and who have not been in employment yet. Eligibility criteria and conditions are limited in scope to people who are earning around the minimum wage or less. This means that employers who invest in reasonable accommodations and in training their workers with a disability run the risk of losing wage subsidies when accommodation and training

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<sup>54</sup> UWV, 'Kwantitatieve informatie 2023' (Quantitative information 2023), April 2024, pp. 49-50, <https://www.uwv.nl/nl/publicaties/cijfers/2024/uwv-kwantitatieve-informatie-2023>.

<sup>55</sup> UWV, 'Kwantitatieve informatie 2021' (Quantitative information 2023), April 2023, pp. 49-50, <https://www.uwv.nl/nl/publicaties/cijfers/2024/uwv-kwantitatieve-informatie-2023>.

<sup>56</sup> UWV, 'UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2021' (Monitoring of labour participation of workers with a disability), <https://www.uwv.nl/overuwv/kennis-cijfers-en-onderzoek/kennis-onderzoeken/uwv-monitor-arbeidsparticipatie-arbeidsbeperkten-2021.aspx>.

<sup>57</sup> Statistics Netherlands (2024), 'Re-integratie-/participatievoorzieningen; type; status voorziening en regio' (Reintegration/participation facilities; type; status of facility and region), <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/85588NED>.

<sup>58</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>59</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

ensures higher productivity, promotion and higher wages.<sup>60</sup> The workers themselves have no financial means to invest in education and training due to low wages, and also because they are often offered only temporary contracts.<sup>61</sup> Another effect is that there are limited incentives for employers to retain employees in a job when they become ill or acquire a disability during their employment. Employers are not entitled to receive a wage subsidy, tax relief or no-risk insurance for these workers simply because they were already in their employment.

According to research, employers tend to favour employees with a physical disability, who they consider to be predictable in their behaviour and in socialising within the company, and for whom accommodations can be stable and predictable. A total of 51 % of employers who are willing to hire jobseekers with a disability will hire only persons with a physical disability; 24 % are willing to hire jobseekers with a psychosocial disability, and 23 % would take on jobseekers with an intellectual disability.<sup>62</sup>

#### **4.1.3 Measure 3: The obligation of all employers to pay wages to employees during the first two years of absence due to illness or disability combined with a legal obligation to offer reintegration within the company.**

The Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005 introduced an obligation on all employers to pay (70 % of) wages to employees during the first two years of absence due to illness or disability, combined with a legal obligation to offer reintegration within the company during the first year of absence.<sup>63</sup> The goal was to provide a financial incentive to employers to do anything possible to prevent work accidents, illnesses and burn-out, and to prevent their employees from having to apply for disability benefits, by offering adapted jobs.

The Act obliges employers not only to pay 70 % of wages for all employees calling in sick during the first two years of absence, but to hire reintegration officers who are to negotiate with the employee who has fallen ill or acquired impairment to find adapted work for them within the company or elsewhere. Small companies are allowed to take out insurance for the financial risk of obligated reintegration and the wage for a maximum of two years of absence.

An employee can be fired after two years, but only after the administrative authority UWV has made an assessment of the reintegration efforts by the employer and employee. The employee can apply for a disability benefit with the UWV after two years of the onset of the disability. A further financial incentive is that the social security charge for employers will automatically increase for five years when one or more of their employees has applied for a disability benefit.

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<sup>60</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Smits, J. (2023), *Striving for an inclusive labour market in Netherlands – Positive actions and reasonable accommodation to facilitate hiring and employment of persons with disabilities involving employers and employer initiatives*, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3e74c0f-faa2-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

<sup>61</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>62</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>63</sup> Based on the Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005 (*Wet werk en inkomen naar arbeidsvermogen*), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0019057/2024-01-01>.

Employers are obliged to provide reasonable accommodation for their employees under the Act on Equal Treatment based on chronic illness and disability.<sup>64</sup> In the event of a dispute on what constitutes a 'reasonable' or disproportionate burden on the employer, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights will regard at least every accommodation that can be financed by the UWV as 'reasonable' or proportionate.

The UWV will provide further reintegration support to the former employee from the moment that a disability benefit is granted. In 2023 the UWV offered reintegration support to 31 613 persons (56 % of them women; 30 % in the 25-34 age group; 28 % between 35-44; 21 % between 45-54; and 16 % between 55-64).<sup>65</sup>

Persons with a disability benefit (either a full or partial benefit) may seek paid work. As a financial incentive, 30 % of the wage earned will not be deducted from the benefit.

In 2005, the total number of persons receiving a full or partial employee-related disability benefit was 933 100. This had decreased to 819 600 by 2012, and it increased slightly to 851 700 in 2024.<sup>66</sup> Of the total available labour force, the percentage of recipients of an employee-related benefit was 9.7 % in 2013 and 8.67 % in 2024.<sup>67</sup> It can be concluded that the measures have, since 2005, led to less dependency on employee-related disability benefits. There are no disaggregated data on sex or age provided by Statistics Netherlands.

There are no known recent comprehensive evaluations of the Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act 2005. In 2020, the Labour Foundation, a national consultative body of trade union federations and employers' associations,<sup>68</sup> evaluated reintegration support for recipients of employee-related benefits. It concluded overall that more efforts could be made through support to enhance labour force participation among persons with employee-related benefits.<sup>69</sup> One specific conclusion was that the UWV does not offer adequate personalised reintegration support. Another conclusion was that more vocational training should be offered to persons with disabilities to enhance their productivity level and to enhance their chances of regaining paid work. A third conclusion was that too many persons who acquired impairment are left without a benefit because the threshold to be assessed as having lost 35 % or more of their former wage-earning capacity is considered to be too high. These conclusions were supported by the Social and Economic Council (SER) which advises national Government on the macro-economic outlook. The Council advised that the threshold for the disability benefit should be lowered,<sup>70</sup> as this would lead to greater uptake of benefits. However, the Council did not question the system itself.

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<sup>64</sup> Act on Equal treatment based on chronic illness and disability (*Wet gelijke behandeling op grond van handicap of chronische ziekte* 2003), <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0014915/2020-01-01>.

<sup>65</sup> *Kwantitatieve informatie 2021 UWV*, April 2022, p. 45, <https://www.uwv.nl/overuwv/Images/uwv-kwantitatieve-informatie-2021.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Statistics Netherlands, '*Sociale zekerheid, kerncijfers naar uitkeringssoort*' (Social security, data on types of benefits), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37789ksz/table>.

<sup>67</sup> Statistics Netherlands, '*Arbeidsdeelname*' (Labour force), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/85224NED/table?dl=A9E3F>.

<sup>68</sup> See Labour Foundation (Stichting van de Arbeid) website at: <https://www.stvda.nl/en>.

<sup>69</sup> '*Report: Wet werk en inkomen naar arbeidsvermogen, aanbevelingen aan de minister van SZW*' (Work and Integration According to Labour Capacity Act, recommendations to the minister of Social Affairs and employment), July 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Social and Economic Council (*Sociaal-Economische Raad – SER*) (2021), *Sociaal-economisch beleid 2021-2025. Zekerheid voor mensen, een wendbare economie en herstel van de samenleving* (Socio-economic policy 2021-2025: security for people, an agile economy and

The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights conducted some research, and concluded in its report<sup>71</sup> that discrimination and denial of reasonable accommodation occurs more often,<sup>72</sup> and that employers are being cautious, or lack knowledge, in respect of the possibilities for support and the provision of reasonable accommodation.<sup>73</sup> The Institute points out that policies and measures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities are complex, and that both persons with disabilities and employers find it difficult to understand what the rules are and to obtain the support they need.

## 4.2 Factors influencing the employment rate of persons with disabilities

The factor that most influences labour force participation rates concerns the general developments in the labour market (which is very tight in the Netherlands) and economic growth. This was visible in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, when participation rates fluctuated for all groups. The fluctuation was more volatile for persons with disabilities, due to the fact that they are, more often than the general population, offered temporary and low-paid jobs and therefore lose out when economic growth is stagnant.<sup>74</sup>

The three main measures, and in particular some specific instruments within these measures, have shown positive results. At the same time, however, the available data are confusing, and for specific groups show outright negative results.

In measures 3 and 1 – the obligation on employers to pay two years of sick leave and the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme – one important instrument to enhance labour force participation was the tightening of eligibility criteria for disability benefits. This seemed to work out well for recipients of employee-related benefits who are granted a partial benefit. Their benefit is partial as they are assessed as having the capacity to earn part of their former wage alongside their benefit. Between 2012 and 2024, labour force participation among this group increased from roughly 43 % to around 50 % for the WIA and WGA benefits.<sup>75</sup> In the same period, the percentage of employee-related benefits decreased, from over 10 % to 8.67 % of the labour force in 2024.<sup>76</sup> Another indication is that recipients of a full disability benefit have a much lower participation rate (8 % in 2012 and 9.8 % in 2022.) This group has the choice to not seek paid work as they receive a full benefit.

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recovery of society), <https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/adviezen/2021/sociaal-economisch-beleid-2021-2025.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (2022), *Additional Report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the adoption of the List of Issues for the initial report of the Netherlands*, February 2022, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCRPD%2fICO%2fNLD%2f47910&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCRPD%2fICO%2fNLD%2f47910&Lang=en).

<sup>72</sup> The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights names an example of denial of reasonable accommodation in Opinion 2020-62, 27 July 2020; Opinion 2020-26, 19 March 2020; Opinion 2018-82, 26 July 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (2020), 'Breed advies' (Comprehensive advisory opinion), pp. 18-21; Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (2020), '*Het werkt anders. Handreiking om de arbeidsparticipatie van mensen met een visuele of auditieve beperking te bevorderen*' (It works differently: guidelines to improve the position of persons with a visual or auditory disability in the labour market), pp. 10-20.

<sup>74</sup> This factor has been described in Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>75</sup> See paragraph 2.5, blue and orange lines in the graph.

<sup>76</sup> Statistics Netherlands, '*Sociale zekerheid, kerncijfers naar uitkeringssoort*' (Social security, data on types of benefits), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37789ksz/table>; '*Arbeidsdeelname*' (Labour force), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/85224NED/table?dl=A9E3F>.

The relationship between higher labour force participation and lower benefit dependency is not visible in respect of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. Labour force participation for persons eligible for the Job Agreement increased sharply in the target groups (in one group, from 19.8 % to 51.7 %, and in the other, from 44.7 % to 51.7 %).<sup>77</sup> This supports the conclusion that the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme have helped to enhance labour force participation for these groups. However, dependency on benefits did not decrease for young persons with a disability – the target group of the Job Agreement. The total number of Wajong benefits for young persons with a disability was 221 600 (2.416 %) in 2012 and 246 000 (2.414 %) in 2024.<sup>78</sup> This contradicts the increase in the labour force participation rate for the target group. Moreover, those persons who find a job as part of the Job Agreement receive wages below the minimum income (as most jobs are part time and/or temporary) and their pay is to be supplemented with unemployment benefits (under the Participation Act).<sup>79</sup> This makes it complicated to see a direct relationship with regard to decreasing benefit dependency in order to increase labour force participation.

Instruments such as wage subsidies and other provisions such as (financing) job coaching and the allowance to pay less than minimum wage are seen as important. They are perceived as essential by employers, and are granted in 100 % of cases in sheltered jobs and in 55 % of jobs under the Job Agreement.<sup>80</sup> Without such provisions, the job is not offered under the conditions of the agreement. This explains why the Netherlands Institute for Social Research found that the labour force participation rate for workers (among whom are many with disabilities) who are dependent on wage subsidies provided by municipalities did not improve.<sup>81</sup> It is because municipalities are very hesitant to grant wage subsidies, as those have to be paid from a limited budget that covers both subsidies and benefits. A wage subsidy for a temporary part-time job for which the worker in question would still need a supplemental benefit is not cost efficient for a municipality.

The effectiveness of wage subsidies and other reintegration support is further undermined because many employers find the system too complicated, and such a burden on the productivity of their employees without a disability that they refrain from using such instruments.<sup>82</sup> This may explain why only 14.7 % of employers actually hire persons with a disability (benefit).<sup>83</sup>

The quota part of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme is effective, in so far as it forces Government and the private sector to account publicly for their efforts to reach their targets. This has positively influenced the debate on labour force participation for

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<sup>77</sup> See Section 2.5, green and purple lines.

<sup>78</sup> Statistics Netherlands, ‘*Sociale zekerheid, kerncijfers naar uitkeringssoort*’ (Social security, data on types of benefits), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37789ksz/table>; ‘*Arbeidsdeelname*’ (Labour force), <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/85224NED/table?dl=A9E3F>.

<sup>79</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>80</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Smits, J. (2023).

<sup>81</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>82</sup> Research cited in Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019): De Beer et al., 2019; Ieder(in), 2019; Fermin, de Looze and Hazelzet, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> UWV, ‘*UWV Monitor arbeidsparticipatie arbeidsbeperkten 2023*’, February 2024, p. 4, <https://www.uwv.nl/nl/publicaties/kennis/2024/uwv-monitor-arbeidsparticipatie-arbeidsbeperkten-2023>.

workers with disabilities.<sup>84</sup> However, the quota may also be considered as ineffective, because targets are not met, and sanctions have never been imposed. Municipalities have never reached their target for sheltered jobs, but they have never been sanctioned. On the contrary, municipalities that fail to reach their target are financially rewarded because they save EUR 10 000 for every job not created.<sup>85</sup> The Quota Scheme applies not to individual companies but to broad sectors within the economy. This may account for the fact that only a small minority of employers (albeit large ones) are willing to hire workers with a disability. Smaller companies are not publicly reproached for not hiring workers with a disability.

National Government employers have evaded the imposition of sanctions (which were due to be imposed in 2021) with the argument that they cannot be expected to offer jobs with low productivity. The Government sector (national Government agencies, ministries) has outsourced low-paid jobs such as serving coffee, cleaning, driving cars) to private companies. Government organisations are instead now promising to include in procurement contracts for such services a condition that contractors offer jobs for eligible persons with disabilities.

The conditions of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme do not stimulate ideas for fundamentally changing the system, and adapting labour conditions and production methods on a large scale to facilitate the employment of workers with disabilities. The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme enforces the idea that employers should create jobs for workers with low educational and productivity levels, and that workers can be productive only if wage subsidies are provided.

Wage subsidies and tax relief are granted on the condition that employers pay at the minimum wage level. Only persons who are assessed as having a theoretical earning capacity below the minimum wage are eligible to register for the Job Agreement. These two conditions mean that the measure to enhance labour force participation for persons with disabilities is aimed at jobs and workers with lowest productivity (and educational) level, and at keeping these workers at that level. There is limited growth in such jobs in the Dutch economy. Moreover, employers who strive for a higher return on investments are usually more likely to reach that goal if they invest in higher productivity within their company, and they do not see creating low-productivity jobs as desirable.

Another negative factor is that provisions for accommodations are usually aimed at compensating for the working capacity limitations of individual workers with a disability. The system does not address how employers could change their labour conditions and organisation of work within their companies such that workers with all types of disability could work at a high-productivity level. There is no general inclination among employers to analyse and adapt job specifications, nor is there a determination to design jobs that are aimed more at people with certain types of disability.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Evaluatie wet banenafpraak en quotum arbeidsbeperkten' (Evaluation Job Agreement and Quota Scheme), letter to Parliament, November 2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/werken-met-arbeidsbeperking/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/11/20/kamerbrief-evaluatie-wet-banenafpraak-en-quotum-arbeidsbeperkten>.

<sup>85</sup> Web publication by Cedris based on the research report by Berenschot (2023), *Infrastructuur sociaal ontwikkelbedrijven* (Infrastructure of social development companies), <https://cedris.nl/nieuws/kwetsbare-werkzoekende-wordt-dupe-van-krimp-sociale-infrastructuur/>.

<sup>86</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2017), 'Arbeidsmarkt in kaart: werkgevers 2017' (Labour market inventory: employers 2017), <http://digitaal.scp.nl/arbeidsmarktinkaart-werkgevers2017>.

In order to change this general inclination, the UWV, together with research institutes, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the employers' organisation, invested in a project called the Coalition for Technology and Inclusion.<sup>87</sup> In 2019 and 2021, this Coalition funded 15 pilot projects in which innovative digital technology was tested in order to see if workers with severe (including intellectual) disabilities could use adapted technology to function as productively as workers without disabilities. The results were positive, but the pilot projects ended and were not implemented on a larger scale.

The workers in the Job Agreement themselves have no financial means to invest in education and training due to low wages, and because they are often offered only temporary contracts.<sup>88</sup> Further research has shown that persons with physical disabilities are not offered enough opportunities to work on improving their employability through learning or studying.<sup>89</sup>

Another effect is that there are limited, or no, incentives for employers to keep employees on when they become chronically ill or acquire a disability during their employment. Employers are not entitled to receive a wage subsidy, tax relief or no-risk insurance for these workers, simply because they were already in their employment.

The conditions for wage subsidies and tax relief also effectively exclude persons with disabilities with a higher level of education, who may contribute to higher productivity within companies. This group might still need (at least temporary) wage subsidies to persuade employers to hire them, as they are considered more of a risk by employers due to their possible need for work adaptations and assumed lower productivity level (more need to rest and more sick leave) in comparison with workers without a disability.

Assumptions by employers about availability and productivity influence people's chances of finding work. One third of persons with disabilities experience discrimination and unequal treatment by employers or work colleagues, in comparison with 25 % of persons without disabilities. One in eight jobseekers with a disability has stopped their attempts to find paid work due to experiencing discrimination.<sup>90</sup>

Another factor undermining the effectiveness of the reintegration support available is that it is not issued to self-employed persons. This hinders entrepreneurship among persons with a disability. A total of 17 % of all workers in the Dutch labour market work as self-employed,<sup>91</sup> and they will face difficulties in obtaining accommodations.

The federation of organisations of persons with a disability, Ieder(in), has criticised the conditions for both the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme and wage subsidies for their

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<sup>87</sup> Coalition for Technology and Inclusion (*Coalitie voor technologie en inclusie*), <https://www.technologievoorinclusie.nl/>.

<sup>88</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>89</sup> Knapen, J., Haarmann, A., Grosscurt R. and Boeije H. (2020), *Verdiepingsstudie Participatiemonitor. Werken met een beperking. Arbeidsomstandigheden van mensen met een lichamelijke beperking* (In-depth study participation monitor: working with a disability – work environment for persons with a physical disability) and *Nivel kerncijfers participatie* (Core data participation), <https://nivel.nl/sites/default/files/bestanden/1003802.pdf> and <https://www.nivel.nl/nl/publicatie/meedoen-de-samenleving-2008-2018-update-kerncijfers-participatiemonitor>.

<sup>90</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2020), *Ervaren discriminatie in Nederland II SCP April 2020* (Experience of discrimination in the Netherlands), <https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2020/04/02/ervaren-discriminatie-in-nederland-ii>.

<sup>91</sup> Flexbarometer, second quarter 2024, <https://flexbarometer.nl/>.

focus on low-paid jobs and on persons with perceived low labour productivity (not being able to earn the minimum wage).<sup>92</sup> According to leder(in), this has led to an inclination among employers to focus solely on hiring workers who are eligible for the Job Agreement and for wage subsidies in order to meet their quota. lederIn finds that this leads to a disadvantage in the labour market for workers with a disability who are not eligible for the Job Agreement nor for wage subsidies. This group is considerable in size: 500 000 persons, according to leder(in). The organisation has repeatedly asked, but in vain, for monitoring of the participation rate of this group.<sup>93</sup> leder(in) further concludes that the specific focus on low-productivity jobs means that the national Government does not understand Article 27 of the UN CRPD, which calls on states to facilitate a more inclusive labour market for all workers with a disability.

Both leder(in) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research point out that current policies for enhancing labour force participation favour specific groups while leaving other groups 'out of sight'. The Job Agreement and Quota Scheme targets young persons with a disability and focuses on creating low-productivity jobs that require heavy subsidies. leder(in) points out that workers with a higher level of education or productivity, but with limitations due to their disability, cannot profit from instruments such as wage subsidies or reintegration support, while the Netherlands Institute for Social Research found that young persons with disabilities who do not qualify for a disability benefit do not profit enough. The Institute found that the overall effects of quotas, tax relief and wage subsidies were limited: the majority of young persons with a disability find a job without any help from either the UWV or their municipality, and without the employer making use of either tax relief or a wage subsidy.<sup>94</sup> Although the UWV has published no data disaggregated by type and severity of impairment or by sex on sheltered employment or the Job Agreement, it is evident, according to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research that persons with intellectual disabilities have less chance of finding paid work; are refused more for sheltered employment; and are more often in unpaid jobs within daycare facilities. For this particular group, the effort to enhance labour force participation has failed.<sup>95</sup> This effect is not measured within participation rate surveys based on EU-SILC data, as this group is not included in those surveys.

Overall, the labour force participation rates for specific groups of recipients of a disability benefit and for persons with a disability assessment but without entitlement to a disability benefit, as measured by the UWV, hover around 50 %. This is below the participation rates based on EU-SILC data, of 67.4 % for men with disabilities and 55.1 % for women with disabilities. This brings up the issue that there is no unambiguous definition of who is counted as having a disability and whose labour force participation rate is measured.

EU-SILC data are based on self-identification as having functional limitations, and only among persons who are working or who are effectively seeking paid work. The UWV counts specific groups of benefit recipients. A complicating factor is that the eligibility criteria for the young workers with disabilities for the Wajong benefit changed in 2015, just as the eligibility criteria for sheltered employment and for the Job Agreement and

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<sup>92</sup> leder(in), April 2021.

<sup>93</sup> The report by leder(in) resulted in a motion in Parliament lodged by MP Potter and others.  
<https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/moties/detail?id=2014Z03253&did=2014D06447>.

<sup>94</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

<sup>95</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

Quota Scheme changed over time. This has changed the make-up of the groups and complicates an analysis of their participation rates.

An illustrative example is that the tighter eligibility criteria for the Wajong disability benefit reduced the number of disability benefit claimants, but enlarged the group of people receiving unemployment benefits from municipalities (under the Participation Act). Around 60 % of people receiving a benefit under the Participation Act describe themselves as unable to seek work due to a disability or chronic illness.<sup>96</sup> However, these claimants are not labelled as persons with disabilities. They are therefore not part of the labour force surveys, and they do not count within the labour force participation rate survey by Statistics Netherlands (and EU-SILC), because they are not actively seeking work. On the other hand, if they are registered for the Job Agreement, their unemployed status does contribute to the participation rate for those who have joined the register, which is monitored by the UWV.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019); Nivel, '*Participatiemonitor 2022*', December 2023, <https://www.nivel.nl/nl/publicatie/participatiemonitor-kerncijfers-2022>.

<sup>97</sup> Participation rate 51.7 % (purple line in graph).

## 5 Future plans and overall assessment

### 5.1 Planned reforms

As the Netherlands has a tight labour market situation, the Government is starting to pay attention (by commissioning research) to the idea of tapping into unused labour potential, including among persons with disabilities. The Dutch Government has estimated, in a letter to Parliament, the untapped labour potential at around 1.2 million people, of whom around 765 000 indicate that they do not seek paid work as a result of illness or a disability.<sup>98</sup>

The Government further aims to simplify reintegration support for employers and to provide a larger budget for wage subsidies, job coaching and other personal support instruments. Wage subsidies for persons with disabilities that were, until 2020, provided for a maximum of three years will, as of 2024, be granted permanently to stimulate employers to change temporary job contracts to permanent contracts.<sup>99</sup>

### 5.2 Potential impact of planned reforms

The national Government's letter to Parliament on untapped labour potential, in which it announced that further research was to be commissioned,<sup>100</sup> has not yet resulted in a more thorough analyses of the situation. The letter does mention persons with disabilities, but in a rather superficial way without going into the specifics of different groups. No impact is to be expected yet.

The potential impact of simplifying reintegration support, as was announced by the national Government, is considered to be small. Simplification will relieve the bureaucratic burden on those large employers who are already in the habit of offering jobs under the Job Agreement. This relatively small group (14.7 %) already has a high take-up of available financial support measures.<sup>101</sup> It seems unlikely that the remaining employers, mostly smaller companies, will be willing to hire workers solely on the basis of a simplified procedure in applying for provisions.

### 5.3 Key lessons from national measures

The set of measures aimed at reducing benefit dependency has shown some success regarding employee-related benefits. It means that employers succeed more, compared with the years before 2005, in retaining their employees who fall ill or acquired impairment while in their service. The main advisory council on socio-economic affairs has advised the Government to lower the threshold for disability

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<sup>98</sup> 'Beslisnota's Kamerbrief Aanpak Arbeidsmarktkrapte', letter to Parliament on the labour market shortage, March 2022, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-sociale-zaken-en-werkgelegenheid/documenten/beleidsnotas/2022/07/11/beslisnotas-kamerbrief-aanpak-arbeidsmarktkrapte-1-van-2>.

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, *Programma Breed offensief* (Programme broad charge) budget plan 2021, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/begrotingen/2020/09/15/xv-sociale-zaken-en-werkgelegenheid-rijksbegroting-2021>.

<sup>100</sup> 'Beslisnota's Kamerbrief Aanpak Arbeidsmarktkrapte', Letter to Parliament on the labour market shortage. March 2022, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-sociale-zaken-en-werkgelegenheid/documenten/beleidsnotas/2022/07/11/beslisnotas-kamerbrief-aanpak-arbeidsmarktkrapte-1-van-2>.

<sup>101</sup> Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2019).

benefits. This would result in an increase in benefits provided, with a potential negative effect on participation rates.

The number of benefits for young workers with disabilities has remained at a stable level, despite the fact that this was a target group for the most important measure, the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme. Labour force participation increased for this specific group, but that does not correspond with a decrease in benefit dependency.

The participation rate for persons with disabilities has increased, but this may be due to economic growth and the tightness of the labour market. It is unclear what effect was felt as a result of the specific measures that were taken as of 2015. The participation rate for specific groups is not comparable over time, as the composition of these groups has changed considerably due to changing eligibility criteria for benefits. It is clear that women with disabilities do not profit as much from the general increase in the participation rate, and that specific groups of benefit recipients lag seriously behind (most notably persons with intellectual disabilities).

Reintegration stimulants such as wage subsidies are aimed exclusively at persons who are low skilled and have low productivity, thus excluding persons with a higher level of education. Employers are forced to fill their quota with jobs at a low productivity level, and to avoid training and promoting their staff with disabilities, because promotion is effectively sanctioned with a loss of the wage subsidy.

The policy is costly. The jobs in the Job Agreement are heavily subsidised and employers need a permanent financial stimulant to keep them going. Workers in these jobs still have to have their wage supplemented with benefits. Municipalities, which are responsible for providing sheltered jobs, have a shortfall in funding for this particular task and have to accept a loss of EUR 10 000 per sheltered job provided.

Despite the focus on low-productivity jobs, it turns out that persons with intellectual disabilities lose out, as they face more rejection in applying for sheltered employment. Their formal labour participation rate is very low. They are offered jobs in companies that are considered daycare activities without a wage.

There is no trend towards a structural change in labour market policies by employers. Employers are not inclined to alter job specifications or to promote structural changes such that their workforce would automatically become more inclusive. The focus is only on creating individual accommodations in specific jobs with wage subsidies in low-productivity labour.

There are no plans to change the conditions for wage subsidies or to broaden eligibility criteria; the focus of the financial instruments remains on workers on low wages.

In a letter to Parliament in April 2022, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment admitted that employers are inclined not to adapt their job specifications or to 'carve' jobs more to the need of workers with disabilities. The minister announced an experiment with a financial incentive to stimulate employers to change their inclination to hire applicants who fit in exactly with existing job specifications.<sup>102</sup> It is unclear what

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<sup>102</sup> 'Actieplan Dichterbij dan je denkt' (Action plan: 'Closer than you think') letter to Parliament by Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, 13 April 2022, <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-7f228d53ba07101f5b369304a539669d8e97ad3c/pdf>.

a financial stimulus would change in terms of employers' inclination to look for the perfect applicant. The experiment has not yet materialised.

#### **5.4 Key lessons from evaluation and monitoring of measures**

As policies to enhance labour participation for persons with disabilities are focused on the groups eligible for the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme, monitoring is focused on this Job Agreement. Success is measured in terms of the number of jobs created and whether this number matches the set targets. Labour force participation in the target group remains low, however, no matter how many jobs are offered through the Job Agreement scheme.

There are no disaggregated data provided by sex or type of impairment. There are indications that women with disabilities and persons with intellectual disabilities are not served as well as others. This outcome has not been questioned so far.

When the UWV provides data on labour force participation among groups of benefit recipients, no reference is made to trends in general labour force participation rates.

There is not much monitoring of the wishes of employers, or analysis of trends in the labour market and how those trends might connect with the untapped labour potential among persons with disabilities. There is no monitoring of participation rates among persons with disabilities who are not eligible for the Job Agreement, and no monitoring or evaluation of the reintegration support that is provided to them.

## 6 Recommendations

### 6.1 Recommendations for the Netherlands

- Recommendation: Set up a target for increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities and reduce the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities.

Rationale: Current policy efforts focus on a relatively small group of persons with disabilities, where some progress has been noted. However, this approach overlooks the broader reality that the overall employment rate for all persons with disabilities is not improving.

- Recommendation: Collect and analyse data – disaggregated by type of disability, age and gender – on labour force participation among all groups of persons with disabilities. Adapt policies to ensure that different groups receive equal support adapted to their needs.

Rationale: There are huge differences in labour participation rate for specific groups. The differences are rarely made visible in monitoring, and are thus never questioned in policy debates.

- Recommendation: Broaden the scope of the Job Agreement and Quota Scheme plus financial incentives such as wage subsidies to cover work that pays more than just the minimum wage. Provide subsidies also for workers who have the potential for higher productivity.

Rationale: The Job Agreement and wage subsidies are currently focused exclusively on low-wage jobs. Employers can reach the quota only by offering these low-productivity jobs, but they are more interested in raising the productivity in their companies. If the conditions for providing wage subsidies and reaching the quota are broadened, it could incentivise employers to hire employees with a disability, which could lead to a fundamental shift to more inclusive labour conditions within companies. It could also improve the image of working persons with disabilities. The Job Agreement currently enforces the idea that persons with disabilities can perform only low-skilled manual labour, and that large subsidies are required to overcome resentment among employers.

- Recommendation: Analyse how a more inclusive labour market, including technological innovation, could be a solution to workforce shortages in all types of sector. Take a step further beyond focusing on adaptations for individual jobs, and stimulate changes in general labour conditions such that persons with disabilities can more easily fit in. An example would be to introduce technological digital innovation in order to support workers with more severe (and intellectual) disabilities to work as productively as workers without disabilities.<sup>103</sup>

Rationale: In an ageing society, a shortage of workers is felt in all types of sector, while at the same time, more people will be limited by illnesses and disabilities. The approach so far is usually on individual provision. It could potentially be more

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<sup>103</sup> See footnote 90.

productive to change labour conditions such that more persons with disabilities can be productive.

## **6.2 Recommendations for the European Commission**

Collect data and analyse labour force participation among specific groups of persons with types of disabilities. Define explicitly for which groups labour force participation could and should be enhanced and supported.

Rationale: Labour force participation rates based on EU-SILC data are broadly defined. That enables a general comparison across EU states, but it does not provide much insight in how national policies work out for different groups and whether national policy aims are acceptable.

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