Country fiche

The Netherlands

EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2023

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Full title
BER	Building Energy Rating
BIM	Building Information Modelling
CBS	Statistics Netherlands
DNB	Dutch National Bank
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ROA	Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1.0 Labour market imbalances

1.1 Overview

The EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2023 identified 194 shortage occupations and one surplus occupation for the Netherlands. This was the highest number of shortage occupations identified by any of the 29 EURES countries that participated in the study. Labour shortages are present across a wide range of local labour markets, sectors and occupations including unskilled occupations and highly educated professions. The profile of the Dutch labour market outlined below, with particular reference to an increased labour supply highly attributable to the high incidence of part-time and temporary employment, combined with the high (post-pandemic) economic growth and low productivity growth in the last year, provides an insight as to the reasons explaining the high number of shortages in the Netherlands.

The Dutch labour market is very strong. The employment rate was 83.5% in 2023 compared to an average of 75.4% for the EU27 and the unemployment rate was 3.6% compared to 6% for the EU27 (Eurostat, n.d.). While these labour market statistics are impressive, the data conceals unusual features of the Dutch labour market.

The level of part-time employment[1] was extremely high at 38.7% in 2023. This is more than double the rate of the EU27 average (17.2%) and it is by far the highest in the EU (Eurostat, n.d.). Furthermore, much of this part-time employment appears to be voluntary. According to a survey by the Dutch National Bank (DNB), the most important reason for not working full-time in the Netherlands is caring for (grand) children (mentioned by 21%, and 38% amongst parents), followed by having more free time (14%), health issues (13%), and lack of financial compensation (11%). Almost one-fourth (22%) indicate that they do not need a higher income (DNB, 2023). Because of the high number of part-timers, the proportion of underemployed part-timers is the highest of the EU27 (5% in 2023Q4; UWV, 2022, and Eurostat, n.d.). The total level of labour market slack - which takes into account part-time workers who wish to work longer hours – was only slightly lower than the EU27 average at 11.8% in 2023Q4. There is a strong gender bias in part-time employment. Most female workers (55%) work part-time. This is three times the rate for Dutch males and twice the OECD average for women. This very high incidence of part-time employment among Dutch women deprives the workforce of a significant source of skills – particularly for the traditionally female occupations in education and healthcare, both of which are experiencing significant shortages. Higher percentages of part-time employment are also seen among young and older workers. More than three-quarters of employed people 15 to 25 years old and 65 to 75 years old worked part-time. The high proportion of young people working part-time is due to the Dutch custom to have a small side job when studying. This explains the high employment rate of 15 to 25 year olds and the high proportion of part-timers in this age group. Part-time work is also more present in some sectors, namely health and welfare, education, and hospitality. On the other hand, the information and communication, energy supply, and construction industries have the lowest percentage of part-time workers (CBS, 2022).

In 2023, the share of workers on temporary contracts was 19.6%, almost twice as high as the average for the EU27 (10.5%). A culture of flexible (i.e., temporary and part-time employment) working has traditionally been a feature of labour market participation in the Netherlands. In 2023Q4, there were 2.7 million workers in flexible employment (seasonally adjusted), while 5.5 million people were in permanent employment. The number of self-employed persons without employees reached 1.3 million in 2023Q4 (CBS, n.d.b). In 2015, reforms were introduced to

1 - Part-time involves paid work up to 35 hours a week. For more information (CBS, 2022)

encourage more flexible working arrangements in the expectation that greater flexibility would increase working hours generally. The reforms included more favourable tax treatment and lower social security contributions for the self-employed and employers were encouraged to recruit own-account workers. Unfortunately, these reforms may have encouraged some employers and workers to adopt a more marginalised approach to the labour market. While it may have sustained relatively high participation rates in nominal terms, the extent to which it has resulted in a significant increase in the number of hours worked is debatable (Gonne, 2023). Temporary employment contracts are often associated with lower wages and more precarious employment conditions than permanent employment. Further, own-account workers typically have fewer pension rights and less protection against illness and disability. The most common sectors where temporary workers are distributed were in 2021: industry, transport and storage, healthcare and welfare, rental and other business services and commerce (Vervliet and Klinker, 2022).

The Dutch labour market recovered very quickly from the pandemic and by 2022, the employment rate was 1.5% higher than in the pre-pandemic year of 2019. The number of vacancies increased steeply since 2020, reaching 464 000 in 2022Q2. Most vacancies in 2023Q4 were in trade, business services, and healthcare. Together, these three industries accounted for half of all vacancies (Soldani et al, 2022). The number of jobs has rapidly grown, and the total number of employed and self-employed jobs reached 11 638 000 in 2023Q4 (which is 114 000 more than a year earlier) (CBS, n.d.a). The recovery in employment was broad-based and included both the private sector and the public sector. The potential labour supply, expressed in terms of availability for work - has not increased as the number of persons either unemployed or inactive and available for work has contracted steadily in recent years (Gonne, 2023), even though studies also show that vulnerable people who have lost their jobs, especially older workers and the long-term unemployed, find it difficult to secure a place in the labour market. The situation of these vulnerable groups has worsened during COVID-19, setting them further from returning to the labour market.

Consequently, some public sectors such as healthcare and education have become severely adversely impacted by shortages, as have some sectors in the private sphere such as construction and software.

The presence of numerous labour shortages in the Dutch economy is also confirmed by the high vacancy rate in 2023Q4, 4.2% compared to 2.5% for the EU27 – the highest among the Member States (Eurostat, n.d.).

The incidence of labour market tightness is felt in a variety of sectors resulting in more work needed to be outsourced, a higher workload for employees, higher costs and fewer opportunities for innovation for employers. For the technical sectors, the most common reasons for the current vacancies cited by employers are an increase in the volume of work (expansion demand), the voluntary departure of employees (replacement demand due to mobility), and ageing employees retiring (Heyma et al., 2022). In addition, personnel turnover in technical sectors happens, especially among women. This drainage concerns not only advancement/turnover to non-technical managerial occupations within technical sectors but also frequent outflow towards other sectors. Replacing these technicians is made difficult due to the limited inflow into technical education and outflow after the completion of technical education which is especially relevant for educational programmes at VET EQF 3 and 4. The lack of skilled employees in technical sectors also impacts goals relating to the societal tasks of the (sustainable) energy transition, housing construction and digital jobs (SER, 2018).[2] This is emphasised by the recent ambition of the Dutch Cabinet to achieve a climate-neutral Netherlands by 2050 and to remain among the leaders in the European Digital Economy and Society Index. In the case of ICT, the representatives of the ICT sector presented in February 2023 the document 'Plan to attack chronic shortage of ICT workers' to the Minister of the Economy. One of the points most strongly emphasised in the document is that the shortage of ICT skills also poses a significant threat to achieving the government's targets in the green agenda (see below) (Loohuis, 2023).

2 - Parliamentary letter. Addressing labour market tightness in the climate and digital transition: The Green and Digital Jobs Action Plan. February 2023.

1.2 Expected future developments

The Dutch labour market will face major challenges in the future. By the end of the decade, the ratio of older persons (i.e., 65+ years) to persons of working age (i.e., 20-65 years) will increase by roughly 5%. The population ageing will result in a contraction of the domestic workforce and an increase in the demand for certain services – especially healthcare. Economic growth is forecasted to be lower over the decade 2025-2034 than in the previous decade of 2015-2024 (Gonne, 2023). However, there are still possibilities for a growth of the workforce as a result of an increasing retirement age and an inflow of foreign workers.

Cedefop (2023) has produced forecasts by occupation for 2025-2035 in the Netherlands, which show very strong growth in many occupations including business and administration, information and communication technology (ICT - both professionals and technicians), health professionals, and teaching. The projected annual growth for information and communication technicians in the Netherlands is higher than in the EU27 as a whole, while the one for ICT professionals and health professionals is lower than the EU average for the period. Nevertheless, the total recruitment needs are very high in absolute numbers for teaching, health, and ICT professionals and this will pose a challenge to the management of the labour market over the next 10 years (Cedefop, 2023).

Different national studies point to future shortages in the labour market. According to Bakens et al (2023), from 2023 to 2028, more than 2.2 million job openings are expected. In 91.5% of cases, this will involve replacing workers leaving the labour market. The remaining demand is caused by economic growth. At the same time, they conclude that there are 1.55 million entrants to the labour market, which is insufficient to fill all job openings. The jobs reporting the highest shortages are nursery teachers/teaching assistants, general managers/managers of production and specialised services, public administration, security and legal professions/government officials and administrators/lawyers, engineers and researchers in mathematics, science and technology, specialists in nature and technology/metalworkers, machine fitters/electricians and electronics fitters, gardeners, arable and livestock farmers, and healthcare specialists.

The immigration of workers from other EU countries (i.e., mobile workers) and third countries (i.e., migrant workers) have contributed to an alleviation of the labour market tightness in recent years, and it is estimated that more than half of the Ukrainians who have fled the war and settled in the Netherlands are in employment (CBS, 2024). While there is further potential to utilise mobile/migrant workers to significantly increase the supply of labour in the Netherlands, there are political sensitivities regarding the extent to which immigration should be used as a major component of any strategy to relieve current shortages. While immigration must be a component of such a strategy, both surveys and political choices suggest that most Dutch people would like to see a multifaceted approach to addressing the problem rather than an exclusive reliance on foreign labour (Gonne, 2023). At the same time, within the current political climate in the Netherlands, after the 2023 election, opportunities to fill labour market shortages with mobile/migrant workers and international graduates are likely to decrease.

While the diffusion of new technologies – and especially artificial intelligence - could increase productivity in certain sectors of the economy, the benefits of applying new technologies to many of the sectors which are suffering the most acute shortages, such as healthcare, education, and construction, are limited. Both healthcare and education require person-to-person interventions, while suitably qualified craft workers are necessary for the installation of sustainable sources of heating or electrical power, but they are currently experiencing severe shortages of labour (see next chapter). Consequently, most of the reforms which are necessary to relieve the future shortage crisis must focus on the supply side, including employment relations and working on sustainable employment. For example, The Borstlap Commission has recommended changes to the financial situation of non-standard employees,[3] to bring them more in line with the situation of permanent employees and the government has begun to implement many of its recommendations (Gonne, 2023).

As of early 2024, there is much focus in the Netherlands on stimulating sustainable employment by investing in the lifelong learning of workers, as well as making better use of untapped the potential of the labour market (Parliamentary Piece, 2023). In addition, one of the most important measures in the last decade has been to make early retirement financially unattractive and to raise the retirement age. The Netherlands now has one of the highest retirement age in Europe (67 years as of 1 January 2024). The labour participation rate of 55–64-year-olds is among the highest in Europe and the labour participation rate of 65–75-year-olds is also increasing significantly.[4]

3 - Non-standard forms of employment such as temporary employment and self-employment provide more flexibility in working relationships as well as flexible labour margin.

4 - Reported by the EURES National Coordination Office to the 2023 ELA Report on shortages and surpluses.

2.0 The construction sector

The challenges confronting the construction industry in the Netherlands are formidable. According to ABN Amro (2022), until 2030, over 90 000 new dwellings per year must be built for the Netherlands to meet the housing needs of the population. In addition, to achieve its targets of reducing carbon emissions from the built environment, a total of 1.7 million dwellings from the existing housing stock must be retrofitted to a high BER (building energy rating) level by 2030. Many commercial buildings and public utilities must also be retrofitted to this standard over the period 2024-2030. Furthermore, large investments in the road infrastructure, the energy network, and water safety and climate are foreseen until 2030.

Although the challenge is daunting, the construction industry in the Netherlands has become highly efficient in recent years. In sharp contrast to the situation in other Member States, the Dutch construction sector exhibited high labour productivity growth (11.8%) over the period 2015-2021. In the EU27 as a whole, labour productivity contracted by 4.6% over this period, with particularly sharp declines in Spain (-19.5%) and Poland (-10.4%) (Gerrard, 2023). However, the actual production capacity of the sector has been lagging for some time. More supply has a dampening effect on price; therefore, in the absence of more supply, prices may rise further. This is the case, threatening to make housing unaffordable for groups who do not have a home, e.g., first-time buyers and divorcees (SER, 2022).

The Dutch generated very positive labour productivity levels mainly through embracing new construction technologies. The Netherlands experienced a housing boom between 2015-2020, and a significant increase in productivity was the only means the sector had for delivering the housing targets. The Dutch introduced robotics into the construction sector at a higher rate than other countries. At 1.5 per 10 000 workers, the use of robots in the construction industry is among the highest in the world and compares favourably with Germany (0.8), the UK (0.3), the United States (0.2), and China (0.1) (Bétin and Zieman, 2019). In addition, the Dutch construction sector has a mandate for open BIM (building information modelling) – one of the few Member States to have such capacity – and this facilitates a more integrated and efficient approach to the construction of large-scale building projects. Nevertheless, despite the embrace of new technologies by the Dutch construction sector, it is difficult to envisage how the Dutch can achieve the national targets in housebuilding and retrofitting. Forecasts suggest that reaching the Dutch target of a reduction of 55% in carbon emissions by 2030 requires approximately 28 000 technical jobs to be created, but other forecasts put the requirements much higher when both direct and indirect employment are taken into account.

One of the reasons why construction labour is in short supply is because the pandemic had an impact on the structure of the apprenticeship system. While apprenticeships in the Netherlands recovered quickly from the pandemic in terms of overall numbers, there was a significant decline in the number of apprentices registering for apprenticeships in construction and engineering skills (Cedefop et al., 2022; EIB, 2023).

In addition, the shortage of construction craft workers in many other EU Member States – as shown by the 2023 EURES report– has meant that the Dutch construction industry has struggled to attract sufficient numbers of qualified craft workers from other EU countries. However, the same report also reveals an oversupply in seven other countries for building construction labourers. Shortages in the Netherlands and surpluses in some other European countries has led to a significant inflow of foreign construction workers. An estimated 70 000 foreign workers currently work in the Dutch construction sector, which is a significant share (UWV, 2024). Nevertheless, the number of permits issued to construction migrant workers declined in the first half of 2023. It is estimated that the labour demands of the sector consist of around 50 000 workers between 2024-2027. Of this number, over 40 000 workers are needed to replace the natural outflow due to retirement and disability. The total demand could be met by the workers supplied via training as the inflow is estimated to be on the same level. However, the estimation of total construction-related labour demands varies between short-term shrinkage and long-term growth. For example, shrinkage is expected in 2024, but from 2026 onwards higher labour demands are expected due to tightened building production and compulsory hybrid heat pumps. The result is a shortage of construction workers which may be described as chronic in respect of some of the skills which are required to deliver sustainable buildings and infrastructure. The OECD notes that while surveys show that 20% of vacancies were difficult to fill in the Netherlands in 2022, the share reached 36% for many of the occupations which are required to implement the green agenda such as roofers, plumbers, and other crafts. In the case of solar panel installers and electrical engineers, more than half of the vacancies were reported as difficult to fill by employers in the sector (Gonne, 2023).

3.0 Conclusions

The Netherlands is currently suffering from widespread labour shortages. While the shortages are particularly acute in healthcare, engineering, construction, and ICT, they are ubiquitous, impacting both unskilled and highly skilled labour and occurring in virtually every single local labour market. The reasons for the shortages are numerous and varied and can be explained by an expansion in demand, a high incidence of part-time and temporary employment, high economic growth, and low productivity growth. In the country, significant labour shortages emerged before the pandemic. The surge in employment which occurred in 2022 and 2023 in many Member States – including the Netherlands – accentuated the gap between the demand and supply.

While the construction industry in the Netherlands embraced new technologies more than any other Member State, it has been unable to achieve a balance between demand and supply through increases in productivity alone. The challenge has been made more difficult by the contraction in the traditional sources of supply of construction skills, namely apprenticeship. While the apprenticeship system in the Netherlands, in general, continues to attract huge numbers of young people, it is significant that these young people are eschewing apprenticeships in construction and engineering skills (EIB, 2023). This is because both the pool of VET apprentices in technical courses and the proportion of construction apprentices within technical courses are decreasing due to a lower number of apprenticeships. From 2025 onwards, the share within technical study programmes is expected to increase again because construction production will pick up again. However, the gap in supply and demand among specialised professions in the (sub)sectors of construction makes it uncertain to what extent sufficient workers will be trained or recruited.

The findings from the EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2023 suggest that the Netherlands is a more severe case of a phenomenon which is pervasive throughout Europe rather than an exception. This phenomenon may be described as a tension between a rising demand for sustainable dwellings and a contraction in the traditional domestic sources of supply of construction skills.

Theoretically, in a well-functioning labour market, an increasing gap between demand and supply in any skillset should be reflected in rising wages which in turn should attract higher levels of interest from jobseekers. In practice, however, research suggests that there may be considerable barriers to entry by foreign-born skilled construction workers to the markets of Member States - even for workers from other Member States. The main obstacles appear to be an insufficient level of language proficiency and difficulties in recognising qualifications from other jurisdictions. In addition, the construction sector in the Netherlands points to a need for more uniform regulations and requirements for clients to limit the demand for technical administrative staff and more uniform certification requirements for electrical engineering professions to lower entry and mobility obstacles in the subsector. For training and education goals it is recommended to bundle (specialisation) courses to maintain the viability which is now limited due to location issues.

The solution to the crisis in construction in Europe may lie in transforming the building process from a construction activity to a predominantly manufacturing activity. Modern methods of construction which entail replacing the traditional structure of dwellings with integrated insulated panels made of light steel gauge or timber (e.g., cross-laminated timber) can complete a dwelling within a fraction of the time it takes to build a traditional structure - thus generating dramatic productivity increases. This revolution in building technology seems inevitable given the pressures to provide sustainable housing for young people and it will significantly alter the occupation and skill structure associated with construction. The so-called wet trades of plastering, bricklaying, and painting and decorating will be most vulnerable to technological displacement and many new skills at operative, craft, and professional levels will be required. A clean, highly technological manufacturing environment could attract young people – including females – to the construction sector and provide a permanent solution to the skill shortages in the European construction industry.

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Annex: List of labour market imbalances (The Netherlands)

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
2411	Accountants
3313	Accounting associate professionals
3343	Administrative and executive secretaries
2431	Advertising and marketing professionals
7233	Agricultural and industrial machinery mechanics and repairers
7127	Air conditioning and refrigeration mechanics
3258	Ambulance workers
2514	Applications programmers
8219	Assemblers not elsewhere classified
2266	Audiologists and speech therapists
7512	Bakers, pastry-cooks and confectionery makers
5132	Bartenders
7234	Bicycle and related repairers
7112	Bricklayers and related workers
7411	Building and related electricians
7119	Building frame and related trades workers not elsewhere classified
8331	Bus and tram drivers
7511	Butchers, fishmongers and related food preparers
3323	Buyers
8322	Car, taxi and van drivers
7115	Carpenters and joiners
2165	Cartographers and surveyors
3434	Chefs
3111	Chemical and physical science technicians
2145	Chemical engineers
3133	Chemical processing plant controllers
8131	Chemical products plant and machine operators
5311	Child care workers
9312	Civil engineering labourers
3112	Civil engineering technicians
2142	Civil engineers
9112	Cleaners and helpers in offices, hotels and other establishments
5151	Cleaning and housekeeping supervisors in offices, hotels and other establishments

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
3331	Clearing and forwarding agents
3322	Commercial sales representatives
110	Commissioned armed forces officers
3513	Computer network and systems technicians
2523	Computer network professionals
7114	Concrete placers, concrete finishers and related workers
1323	Construction managers
3123	Construction supervisors
4222	Contact centre information clerks
5244	Contact centre salespersons
5120	Cooks
8343	Crane, hoist and related plant operators
3312	Credit and loans officers
2529	Database and network professionals not elsewhere classified
2521	Database designers and administrators
4214	Debt collectors and related workers
3251	Dental assistants and therapists
2261	Dentists
3254	Dispensing opticians
9111	Domestic cleaners and helpers
3118	Draughtspersons
8342	Earthmoving and related plant operators
2631	Economists
1345	Education managers
2351	Education methods specialists
8212	Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers
3113	Electrical engineering technicians
2151	Electrical engineers
7413	Electrical line installers and repairers
7412	Electrical mechanics and fitters
3114	Electronics engineering technicians
2152	Electronics engineers
3333	Employment agents and contractors
2263	Environmental and occupational health and hygiene professionals

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
3257	Environmental and occupational health inspectors and associates
2133	Environmental protection professionals
9411	Fast food preparers
2413	Financial analysts
2412	Financial and investment advisers
7122	Floor layers and tile setters
8160	Food and related products machine operators
5246	Food service counter attendants
9333	Freight handlers
7544	Fumigators and other pest and weed controllers
9611	Garbage and recycling collectors
6113	Gardeners, horticultural and nursery growers
2211	Generalist medical practitioners
7125	Glaziers
3354	Government licensing officials
3353	Government social benefits officials
9121	Hand launderers and pressers
5321	Health care assistants
2269	Health professionals not elsewhere classified
8332	Heavy truck and lorry drivers
5322	Home-based personal care workers
1411	Hotel managers
4224	Hotel receptionists
1212	Human resource managers
2141	Industrial and production engineers
7422	Information and communications technology installers and servicers
3512	Information and communications technology user support technicians
4225	Inquiry clerks
7124	Insulation workers
3321	Insurance representatives
3432	Interior designers and decorators
9412	Kitchen helpers
3411	Legal and related associate professionals
2619	Legal professionals not elsewhere classified

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
3342	Legal secretaries
3141	Life science technicians (excluding medical)
8344	Lifting truck operators
8311	Locomotive engine drivers
2421	Management and organization analysts
1321	Manufacturing managers
3122	Manufacturing supervisors
2144	Mechanical engineers
8211	Mechanical machinery assemblers
3214	Medical and dental prosthetic technicians
3212	Medical and pathology laboratory technicians
3256	Medical assistants
3211	Medical imaging and therapeutic equipment technicians
3344	Medical secretaries
7223	Metal working machine tool setters and operators
6130	Mixed crop and animal producers
8341	Mobile farm and forestry plant operators
7231	Motor vehicle mechanics and repairers
210	Non-commissioned armed forces officers
3221	Nursing associate professionals
2221	Nursing professionals
3341	Office supervisors
9129	Other cleaning workers
7131	Painters and related workers
2240	Paramedical practitioners
4313	Payroll clerks
5329	Personal care workers in health services not elsewhere classified
2423	Personnel and careers professionals
4416	Personnel clerks
3213	Pharmaceutical technicians and assistants
2262	Pharmacists
2264	Physiotherapists
7123	Plasterers
7126	Plumbers and pipe fitters

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
5412	Police officers
2422	Policy administration professionals
7311	Precision-instrument makers and repairers
2341	Primary school teachers
5413	Prison guards
2163	Product and garment designers
7543	Product graders and testers (except foods and beverages)
4322	Production clerks
1349	Professional services managers not elsewhere classified
5419	Protective services workers not elsewhere classified
2634	Psychologists
2432	Public relations professionals
8312	Railway brake, signal and switch operators
3334	Real estate agents and property managers
1223	Research and development managers
1412	Restaurant managers
7121	Roofers
2330	Secondary education teachers
5414	Security guards
5245	Service station attendants
7213	Sheet metal workers
8350	Ships' deck crews and related workers
3152	Ships' deck officers and pilots
3151	Ships' engineers
5223	Shop sales assistants
5222	Shop supervisors
5221	Shopkeepers
2635	Social work and counselling professionals
3412	Social work associate professionals
2519	Software and applications developers and analysts not elsewhere classified

Information on the typology of labour shortage was not provided.

ISCO code	Surplus occupations
5164	Pet groomers and animal care workers

ISCO code	Shortage occupations
2512	Software developers
2352	Special needs teachers
2212	Specialist medical practitioners
7132	Spray painters and varnishers
3314	Statistical, mathematical and related associate professionals
4321	Stock clerks
7214	Structural metal preparers and erectors
1324	Supply, distribution and related managers
2522	Systems administrators
2511	Systems analysts
2433	Technical and medical sales professionals (excluding ICT)
2153	Telecommunications engineers
7222	Toolmakers and related workers
2164	Town and traffic planners
4323	Transport clerks
5112	Transport conductors
6112	Tree and shrub crop growers
2310	University and higher education teachers
7534	Upholsterers and related workers
3315	Valuers and loss assessors
9122	Vehicle cleaners
2250	Veterinarians
2320	Vocational education teachers
5131	Waiters
2513	Web and multimedia developers
7212	Welders and flame cutters
8113	Well drillers and borers and related workers
9123	Window cleaners
7523	Woodworking machine tool setters and operators

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