

View on labor migrants

A perception study on the position of EU labor migrants, third country nationals and displaced Ukrainians in the Netherlands.

This research aims to understand the experiences of people who have lived in the Netherlands for less than five years, came for work, and earn up to 130% of the minimum wage. In particular, the focus is on EU citizens, non-EU migrants (third-country nationals), and displaced Ukrainians. The study presents results from a survey completed by 3,042 respondents, making it the largest study of its kind in the Netherlands. The participants included 1,944 EU citizens, 149 non-EU migrants, and 260 Ukrainians, all with low incomes. EU citizens with higher incomes (above 130% of the minimum wage) were also surveyed for comparative purposes.

Research method and data gathering

The data was collected physically at various locations and times and through online channels to ensure that the group is as representative as possible. It is important to underline that the survey focuses on legal labor migrants and does not represent informal or illegal workers, or well-paid migrants such as white-collar employees (expats). This focus allows for a better understanding of the situation of the average labor migrant.

The study looked at work, registration, housing, health and social integration. The results were compared with Dutch averages and other migrant groups to show the relative position. The study also looked at how migrants' experiences change with longer stays in the Netherlands.

Key findings of the study

The results show both positive developments and ongoing challenges for the target group. On the positive side, most participants are satisfied with their work, housing, and health. Many demonstrate clear signs of improvement in their life situation. EU citizens with low incomes who have lived in the Netherlands longer, tend to move to better housing and secure more stable employment contracts. However, not everyone benefits equally. Some remain stuck in temporary housing or temporary job arrangements, leading to uncertainty. Additionally, mental health is a growing concern, especially for those living more than five years in the Netherlands. Moreover, low-income EU migrants often feel isolated, with limited connections to Dutch society. While many plan to stay permanently, better integration and support are needed to improve their long-term prospects.

The key findings per theme are listed below

Labor Market Position

- More than 50 percent of EU citizens are satisfied with their work and the work conditions. Just over a quarter are neutral and only 15 to 18 percent are (very) dissatisfied. Compared to the Dutch average, these results are significantly lower.
- EU workers who stay longer in the Netherlands often secure more stable jobs and contracts. For example, many of them are employed directly by a company. Nevertheless, satisfaction does not necessarily improve over time, and

approximately a third of the workers remain in temporary positions even after more than five years in the Netherlands.

- Many EU employees experience job insecurity, have temporary contracts (70 percent) and flexible working hours. In one way or another, they tend to be dependent on their employer, often an employment agency, for work, registration, health insurance and sometimes even housing. This dependence creates vulnerability for them in the labor market and for their general position in the Dutch society.

Registration

- 57 percent of low-income EU citizens are registered either in the BRP register or in the non-residents register. However, many respondents find the registration system too complex, with 26 percent unsure of their registration status. Simplifying the system could help EU citizens gain better clarity and control over their registration.

Housing

- EU citizens rent their accommodation mostly through the employer or employment agency (62 percent). It is mostly shared rental housing (40 percent) with a shared bedroom and bathroom. Sharing of housing decreases the longer one stays in the Netherlands.
- More than 60 percent of the respondents are satisfied with their housing. Over time, their living arrangements show signs of improvement, with increased movement into private rentals or more permanent housing. However, even after five years, around one-third continue to rent from employers under temporary conditions.

Health and Well-being

- 70 percent of EU citizens rate their health as good or very good. This compares to 78 percent among people without a migration background in the Netherlands. However, three-quarters of respondents reports experiencing anxiety or depressive feelings in the past four weeks, which is highly concerning.
- Trust in Dutch healthcare is mixed: about one-third have strong trust, another third express little trust, and the rest are neutral.

Social and Cultural Integration

- Only about a quarter of EU citizens feel valued in the Netherlands, and one-third feel at home. There is no clear connection between the length of stay and feeling appreciated. Overall, EU-workers with a low income feel less integrated compared to the other migrant groups.
- EU citizens have closer relationships with people from their own background. Many rarely interact with Dutch friends, highlighting limited integration. The results show that EU labor migrants often feel disconnected from Dutch society. Their limited sense of belonging and fewer interactions with locals make integration harder.

Future Expectations and Language Proficiency

- About 23 percent of the respondents plan to stay in the Netherlands permanently, while 15 percent intend to leave within a year. The remaining respondents are unsure of their plans.
- Language barriers remain significant, with nearly 70 percent wanting to improve their Dutch but facing obstacles.

Third-Country Nationals and Displaced Ukrainians

The third-country nationals and displaced Ukrainians generally share similar labor market positions with EU citizens with a comparable income, often working in the same sectors under temporary contracts. However, their position is influenced by the *Richtlijn Tijdelijke Bescherming Oekraïne*, which grants them different labor market rules, and this distinguishes them from third-country nationals.

Conclusion

The goal of ensuring that EU citizens and third-country nationals in low-income jobs are not treated as second-class citizens has not been achieved yet. Significant discrepancies are still evident in some aspects of life and work, and the sense of belonging and appreciation is insufficient. Continuous efforts to improve the position of these groups, who are part of society and often perform essential work for the Dutch economy, therefore seems very important and still accurate.