

## Contents

### [Summary](#)

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)



# Tapping into Talent. The Untapped Labour Potential of Migrants

Factsheet

Dutch Advisory Council on Migration  
June 2025

## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)



### Summary

There is a large untapped labour potential among migrants living in the Netherlands. Around 330,000 migrants aged between 25 and 65, one fifth of the total group, would be employed if their participation in the labour market was equal to that of comparable Dutch nationals without a migration background. This number (330,000) represents 3% of the overall employed population in the Netherlands, and could fill more than three quarters of all current job vacancies.

If more migrants enter the labour market, three objectives are achieved at once. Migrants gain a higher income and greater wellbeing; employers can more easily meet their staffing needs and rely less on new labour migrants; and society benefits from lower social security expenditure, higher tax revenues and more staff available for essential services.

#### Untapped potential highest among asylum migrants

The extent of untapped labour potential differs widely between groups of migrants, depending on age, gender, migration motive and country of origin. It is highest among migrants aged 45 and above, women, and asylum and family migrants from outside the EU. Almost half of the total untapped potential consists of asylum migrants and displaced persons from Ukraine and their family members. By country of origin, nearly 40% of the untapped potential is concentrated in three countries: Turkey, Morocco, and Syria.

#### No untapped potential among labour migrants

For most migrant groups, labour market participation rises and untapped potential decreases the longer they remain in the Netherlands. Labour migrants form an exception. They already show higher participation from the moment they arrive than comparable Dutch nationals without a migration background. Among asylum migrants, however, a large untapped potential remains, even after a residence period of ten years or more.

#### Migrants work more hours

Employed migrants generally work more hours than Dutch nationals in similar jobs. There is therefore no untapped potential in terms of hours worked. Initially, employed migrants tend to earn relatively low wages and most hold insecure, flexible contracts. Over time, however, the differences with other workers diminish. There may still be a degree of qualitative underemployment among migrants who are employed.

#### Language skills are crucial

Education and proficiency in Dutch are the most important factors in reducing untapped labour potential. Other factors can also play a role, such as recognition of foreign qualifications, attitudes to the division of roles between men and women, and discrimination.

## Contents

### Summary

1. **What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?**
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 Asylum migrants
  - 6.2 Ukrainian displaced persons
  - 6.3 Family migrants
  - 6.4 Labour migrants
  - 6.5 Study migrants
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 1. What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?

In this report, the term *migrants* refers to all residents who were born abroad and whose parents were both born abroad. Second generation migrants are therefore excluded. The term *migrant* is used here purely as a statistical category. It is not intended to suggest that people born abroad should still be regarded as *migrants* after living in the Netherlands for a long period of time.

By *comparable* we mean individuals of the same age group and gender. This ensures that differences in the composition of the migrant population and the population without a migration background are taken into account. The untapped labour potential therefore indicates how many additional migrants would be in employment if their labour market participation matched that of Dutch nationals without a migration background.

Figure 1: Labour market participation of Dutch nationals without a migration background and of migrants aged 25 to 65, by sex and age group (%), 2022



The concept of untapped labour potential does not cover all migrants who are not working. It concerns the gap with Dutch nationals without a migration background. In that group there is also labour potential, for example among people who receive social benefits, but this analysis does not focus on them. Even if the untapped potential of migrants were fully realised, not all migrants would have paid work, but their labour market participation would be equal to that of Dutch nationals without a migration background.

Labour market participation refers to the share of the potential workforce that has paid work, either as an employee or self-employed. The **untapped labour potential** of migrants is defined as the difference in labour market participation between migrants and comparable Dutch nationals without a migration background (see Figure 1).

## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. **Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants**
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 2. Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants

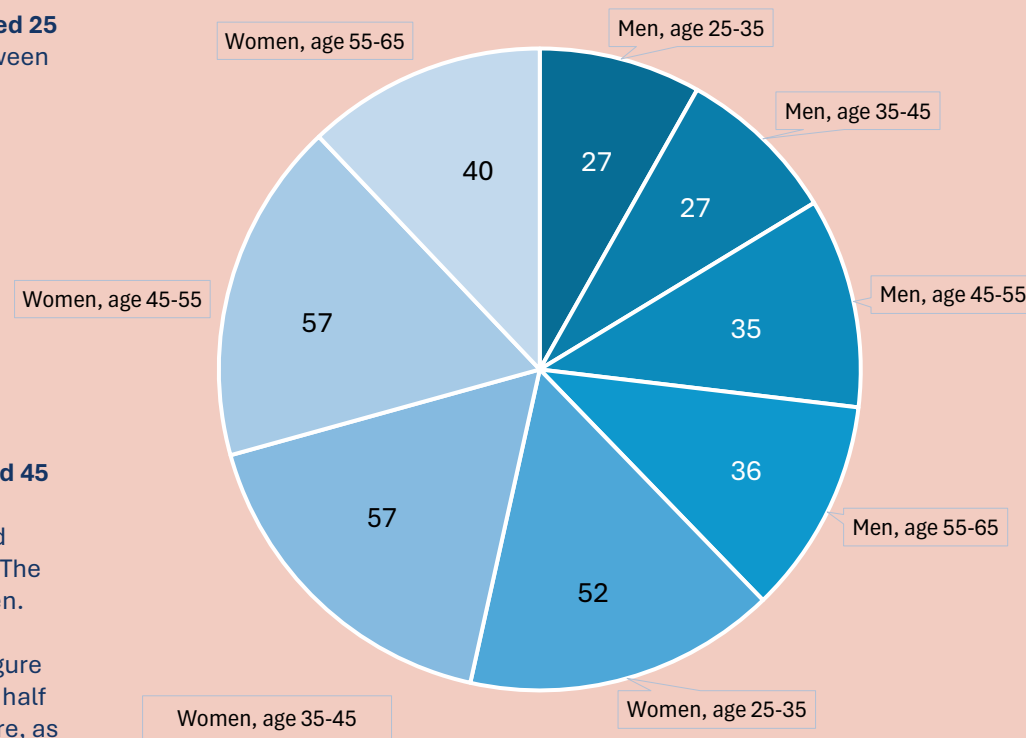
**In 2022, the total untapped labour potential among migrants was 331,000 individuals, representing 20% of the migrant population aged 25 to 65.** This figure takes into account differences in age and gender between migrants and Dutch nationals without a migration background.

To put this in perspective, this number is roughly equivalent to three-quarters of all job vacancies and about 3% of the total workforce in the Netherlands. If this potential could be tapped into, it would make a significant contribution to reducing labour shortages and meeting employers' staffing needs. At the same time, it is important to note that not everyone in this group is immediately or fully available for work, and their skills and preferences do not always match the needs of businesses and organisations.

**The untapped potential is greatest among women and migrants aged 45 and over.** There are marked differences between men and women and across age groups (see Figure 1). Among migrant women, the untapped potential stands at 23.4%, compared with 15.3% among migrant men. The share of untapped potential increases with age, particularly among men.

Women account for 63% of the total untapped labour potential (see Figure 2). The untapped group is evenly divided: half are younger than 45, and half are between 45 and 65 years old. Individuals under 25 are excluded here, as many are still studying.

Figure 2: Untapped labour potential of migrants aged 25 to 65 (x 1,000), 2022



## Contents

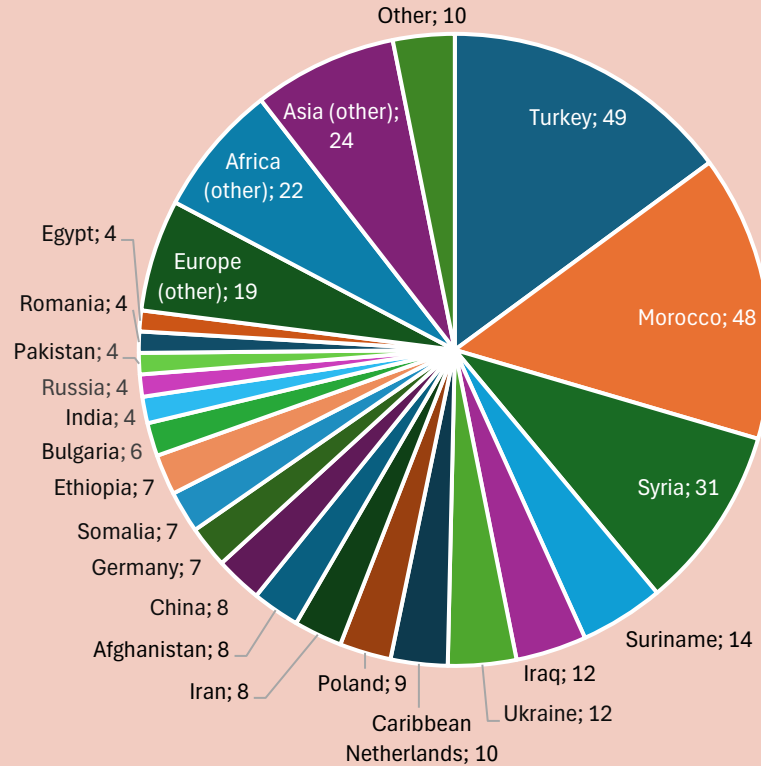
### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. **Untapped labour potential by country of origin**
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 3. Untapped labour potential by country of origin

**Migrants from Turkey, Morocco and Syria account for almost 40% of the total untapped labour potential among migrants.** This group represents around 130,000 individuals, nearly two-thirds of whom are women. Among Turkish and Moroccan migrants, the untapped labour potential is concentrated mainly among those aged 45 and over. In contrast, among Syrian migrants, the untapped labour potential is significant across all age groups, including younger individuals (see Figure 3). Of the total untapped labour potential of 331,000 individuals, nearly half (146,000) come from Asia (including Turkey and Syria), followed by Africa (83,000), Europe (65,000), and other world regions (37,000).

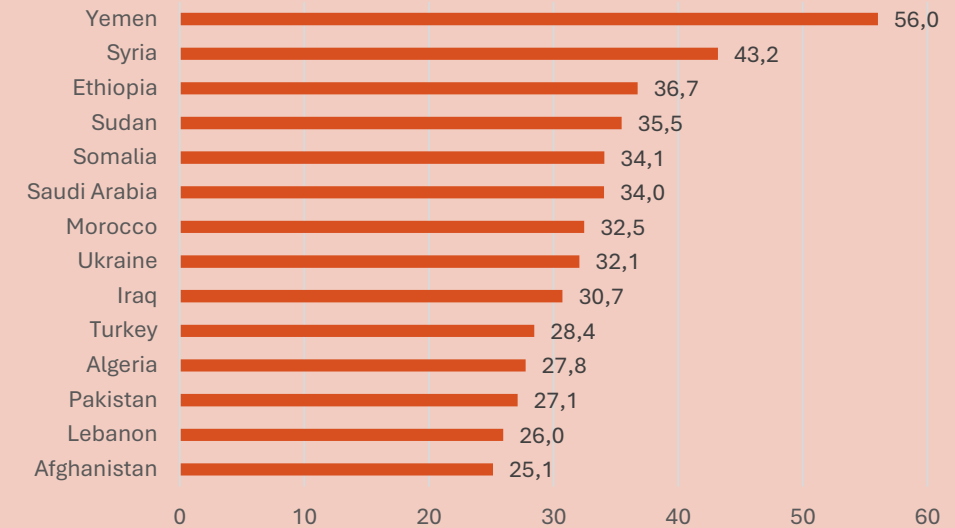
Figure 3: Untapped labour potential among migrants aged 25 to by country of origin (x 1.000), 2022



Note: The Caribbean Netherlands also includes Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten

**The proportion of untapped labour potential is highest among migrants from Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, and Sudan:** in these groups, more than one in three individuals fall within the category of untapped potential (see Figure 4). With the exception of Syria, however, the absolute numbers remain limited, as these migrant groups are relatively small.

Figure 4: Countries of origin where an untapped labour potential exceeds 25%, 2022



## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. **[Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)**
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 4. Untapped labour potential by migration motive

There are substantial differences in untapped labour potential between migrants with different migration motives (see Figure 5).

**Among asylum migrants, the untapped labour potential is the highest, at 44%.** For women, it is significantly higher than for men (see Figure 5a). Among Ukrainian displaced persons (covered under the motive of *temporary protection*), the untapped potential stands at 32%.

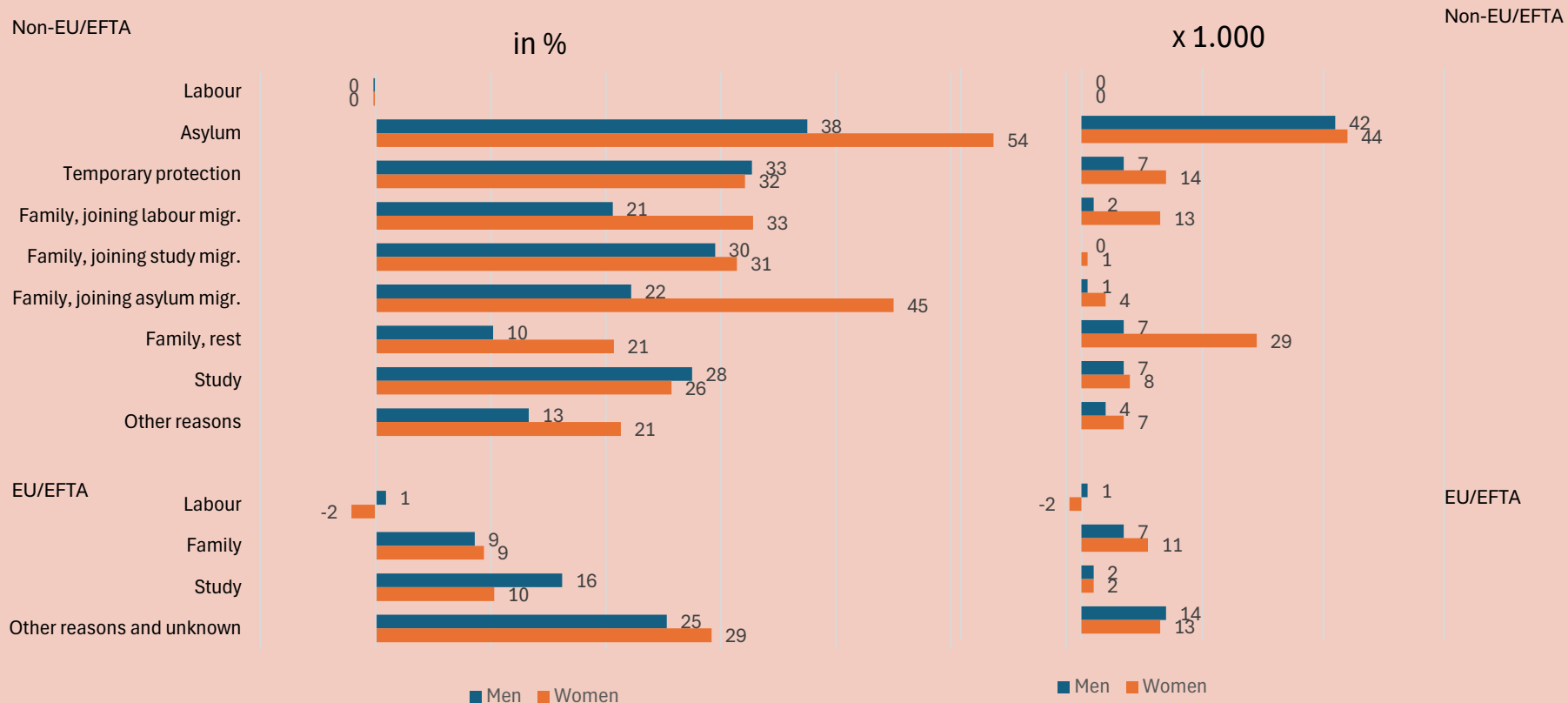
**Asylum migrants (including family reunification migrants and family migrants accompanying an asylum migrant, as well as Ukrainian displaced persons) make up nearly half of the total untapped labour potential** (see Figure 5b).

**Among family migrants from outside the EU/EFTA, the untapped potential is also high, at almost 21%.** It is particularly high among family migrants who have joined an asylum migrant (38%), but it is also elevated among family migrants accompanying labour or study migrants.

**Among labour migrants, there is no untapped labour potential;** in fact, they work more than Dutch nationals without a migration background.

**For nearly all migration motives, the untapped labour potential is higher among women than among men.**

Figure 5: Untapped labour potential among migrants aged 18 to 75 years (a. in percent, and b. in absolute numbers) broken down by migration motive and gender, 2022



## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. **[Quality of migrants' employment](#)**
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 5. Quality of migrants' employment

Even when migrants are employed, there can still be untapped (qualitative) potential, as their skills and competences are not always fully applied in the work they do. To examine this, we compare the wages, contract types and working hours of migrants with those of the overall workforce in the Netherlands, and look at how these factors change with longer residence.

### Migrants are more likely than the average worker to earn a low hourly wage, defined as up to 30% above the statutory minimum wage.

Female migrants earn less than male migrants. The only group less likely than the average worker to earn a low wage are labour migrants from outside the EU/EFTA (mainly highly skilled migrants). By contrast, asylum migrants and Ukrainian displaced persons are the most likely to have low wages.

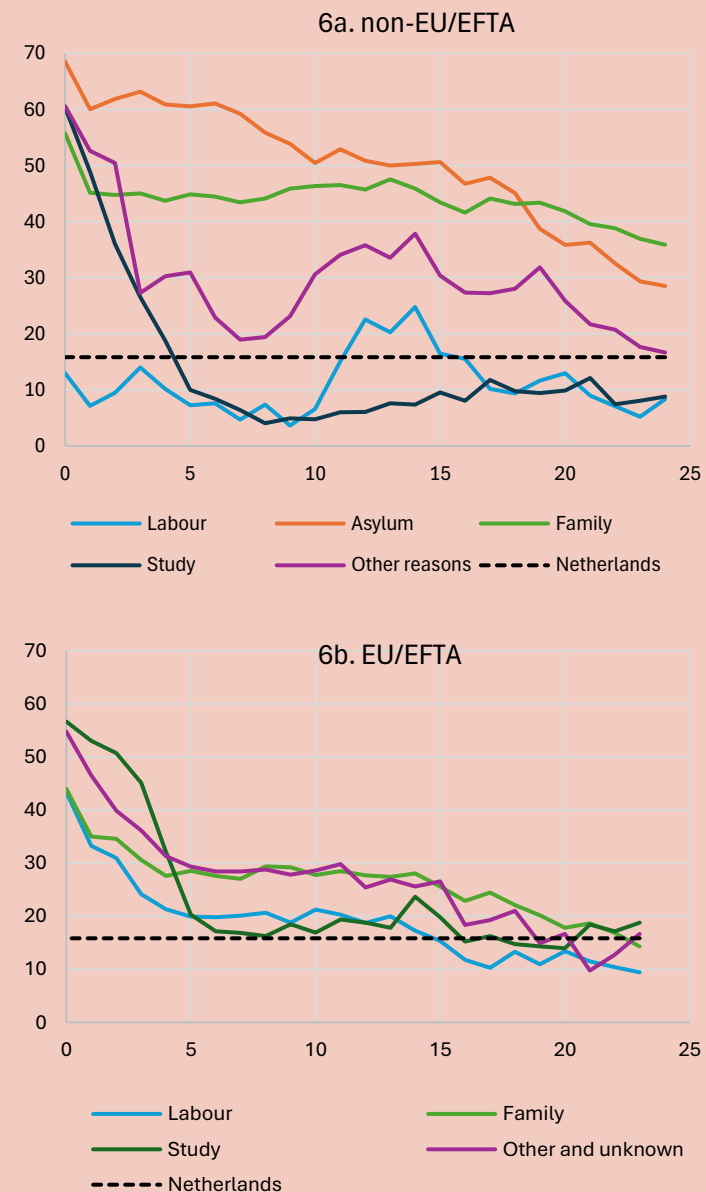
The likelihood of earning a low wage decreases over time. The longer migrants reside in the Netherlands, the lower the wage-gap (see Figure 6). However, even after ten years or more, asylum migrants and family migrants are still far more likely to earn low wages than the average worker.

**Half of all working migrants are employed on a flexible contract,** compared with one-third of Dutch nationals without a migration background. The share of flexible contracts declines sharply the longer migrants stay in the Netherlands. After ten years, in most groups at least half have a permanent contract. Among working asylum migrants, however, as many as 70% are still on a flexible contract after ten years.

**Migrants are also less likely to be self-employed than Dutch nationals without a migration background:** 11% of working migrants are self-employed, compared with 17% of Dutch nationals without a migration background.

**In terms of working hours, most employed migrants work more hours per week than Dutch nationals without a migration background.** There is therefore *no* untapped potential in terms of working hours. This is especially true for female migrants, who often work more hours than Dutch women without a migration background, around two-thirds of whom work part-time.

Figure 6: Share of employees earning up to 130% of the statutory minimum wage by migration motive and length of stay, and for Dutch nationals without a migration background, aged 25 to 65 years, 2022



## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. **Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants**
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 6. Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants

Based on an analysis of available CBS statistics and the SIM survey\* conducted by SCP, we arrive at the following findings. These focus only on the characteristics of migrants themselves; the role of employers and the wider labour market will be examined in further research.

**The untapped labour potential decreases with length of stay in the Netherlands.** The longer migrants reside in the country, the greater the likelihood of being employed. Labour migrants form an exception; they already show very high labour market participation from the outset. The pace at which untapped potential declines with length of stay does, however, differ by migration motive. Among study migrants, there is virtually no untapped potential after five years – if they remain in the Netherlands following their studies. Among asylum migrants, by contrast, a substantial level of untapped potential remains even after long-term residence (ten years or more).

**Recently arrived migrants find their way into the labour market more quickly than those who arrived in earlier decades.** After three years of residence, migrants who entered the Netherlands in the past ten years are more often in paid work than those who migrated between 1999 and 2010. Nonetheless, among asylum migrants a larger share of untapped labour potential persists even after longer stays.

**The higher level of education, the smaller the untapped labour potential.** There is a strong relation between education level and labour market participation, both among migrants and among Dutch nationals without a migration background. For men, the difference in labour market participation between highly educated individuals (with an applied sciences university or university degree) and those with lower education levels (at most a pre-vocational secondary education diploma) is about 10 percentage points. Among women, the gap is more than 20 percentage points. Migrants who completed their highest level of education in the Netherlands (particularly women) are more likely to be in work than those who completed their studies abroad. This suggests that foreign diplomas are not valued as highly as qualifications obtained in the Netherlands.

**Knowledge of the Dutch language also has a strong positive effect on labour market participation.** Migrants with good Dutch language skills are much more likely to be in paid work than those without such skills. This difference is especially large among male migrants.

**Substantial differences remain in labour market participation of migrants from different countries of origin and with different migration motives, even after educational levels and language proficiency are taken into account.** Untapped labour potential is particularly high among asylum migrants, family migrants, and migrants from Morocco, Turkey, and Somalia, compared with labour migrants, study migrants, and migrants from Suriname, the Caribbean Netherlands, Iran, and Poland, even when education and language skills are similar.

**Labour market participation is also influenced by socio-cultural factors.** Migrants with a working partner are themselves more likely to be in paid work. Female migrants with a working partner have about 24 percentage points higher labour market participation than those with a non-working partner. Among male migrants, this difference is smaller. For female migrants, attitudes towards the division of roles between men and women are also strongly linked to labour market participation: the more supportive they are of equal role distribution, the greater their likelihood of being in paid work.

\* For details on the [methodology](#), see the final section of this factsheet.

## Contents

### Summary

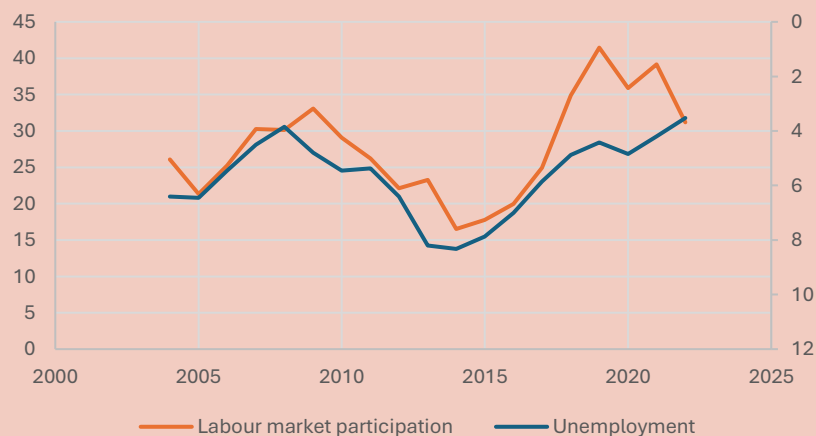
1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 **Asylum migrants**
  - 6.2 **Ukrainian displaced persons**
  - 6.3 Family migrants
  - 6.4 Labour migrants
  - 6.5 Study migrants
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 6.1 Asylum migrants

**The untapped labour potential is highest among asylum migrants (including family reunification migrants and family migrants accompanying asylum seekers).** Their labour market participation remains well below that of Dutch nationals without a migration background, even after many years of residence. It should be noted, however, that these figures refer to the year 2022. Since November 2023, asylum seekers have been permitted to work throughout the year after six months in the asylum procedure, whereas previously they were restricted to only 24 weeks a year. Their participation may therefore already be higher.

**The labour market participation of asylum migrants fluctuates strongly with the general unemployment level (see Figure 7).** Asylum migrants benefit significantly when unemployment declines, but they are highly vulnerable during an economic downturn.

Figure 7: Share of asylum migrants in work five years after arrival in the Netherlands (%; left axis) and unemployment rate (right axis, inverted scale), by calendar year



**Simulation analysis shows that the untapped labour potential of asylum migrants decreases significantly if we assume that they speak Dutch fluently and have completed their highest level of education in the Netherlands.** For male asylum migrants, the untapped potential would almost entirely disappear, while for women it would be reduced to around 10%.

**When asylum migrants are employed, they often have low-paid jobs and flexible contracts.** Their labour market position tends to improve only gradually over time. Initially, about 70% earn little more than the statutory minimum wage, and after ten years this applies to roughly 50%. The share earning above 250% of the statutory minimum wage hardly increases.

## 6.2 Ukrainian displaced persons

**Ukrainian refugees have a special legal status.** Under the *EU Temporary Protection Directive*, they were granted immediate access to housing, work, and education without going through the asylum procedure. In 2022, more than 108,000 Ukrainians arrived in the Netherlands, including 66,500 individuals aged 18 to 75. Two-thirds were women, and 56% were under the age of 40. Our data refer only to 2022, the first year in which Ukrainians entered the Netherlands under this scheme.

**In 2022, 54% of Ukrainians aged 25 to 65 were in paid work.** This is considerably lower than among Dutch nationals without a migration background (86%), but higher than among asylum seekers (34.5%).

**The untapped labour potential among Ukrainians in 2022 was 32% (21,000 individuals), the majority of whom were women.** Among women aged 30 to 40, the untapped potential was even 40% (4,700 individuals). Many of them are single mothers, as highlighted in our recent report *From vulnerabilities to opportunities: a better future for Ukrainian children and young people*.

**Although Ukrainians are more likely to be employed than asylum migrants, their work is often low-paid and insecure.** Around 70% are employed through temporary agencies or on zero-hour contracts.

**Among working Ukrainian displaced persons, 73% of women and 57% of men earn a low hourly wage** (less than 30% above the statutory minimum wage). Only 2% of women and 3% of men earn at least 250% of the statutory minimum wage (the threshold for the national highly skilled migrant scheme). Half of Ukrainian women work full time, compared with 60% of men.

## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)**
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)
7. [Policy considerations](#)

### 6.3 Family migrants

**Among family migrants from outside the EU/EFTA, the untapped labour potential is 21%.** Within this group, the share is 22.6% among family reunification migrants, who join an existing family, and 18.4% among family migrants, who enter the Netherlands to start a new family relationship. The untapped potential is much higher among women (29.3%) than among men (20.3%). For male family reunification migrants, the potential is particularly low, at only 8%.

**Family migrants who arrived together with an asylum seeker have the highest untapped labour potential, at 38%.** Those who joined a labour migrant or a study migrant also face a high untapped potential of over 30%. By contrast, among other family migrants, such as those who came to the Netherlands to marry a Dutch citizen without a migration background, the untapped potential is lower, at 17%.

**For family migrants from EU/EFTA countries, the untapped labour potential is considerably lower at 9%.**

**The gap in labour market participation between family migrants and Dutch nationals without a migration background narrows quickly as their length of stay in the Netherlands increases.** However, among younger family migrants under 30 and among women, a substantial difference remains even after many years of residence.

**Female family migrants are also more likely to be concentrated in low-paid jobs. Even after a long stay in the Netherlands,** half of them work no more than 25 hours per week, often in on-call or substitute positions.

**Family migrants generally remain longer in the Netherlands than labour or study migrants, and therefore represent a larger share of the population.** After ten years, half of the family migrants have left the country, compared to 75% of labour migrants.



## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 [Asylum migrants](#)
  - 6.2 [Ukrainian displaced persons](#)
  - 6.3 [Family migrants](#)
  - 6.4 [Labour migrants](#)**
  - 6.5 [Study migrants](#)**
7. [Policy considerations](#)

## 6.4 Labour migrants

**Of all migrants who arrived in the Netherlands in 2022, nearly one quarter were labour migrants.** The majority of them came from the EU/EFTA (46,700 of the 75,430 labour migrants). Since the eastern enlargement of the European Union, labour migration from EU/EFTA countries has steadily increased.

**There is no untapped labour potential among labour migrants.** From the moment of arrival, their labour market participation is high.

**There is also no untapped potential in hours worked.** Once in paid employment, labour migrants typically work more hours than comparable Dutch employees without a migration background. This is most pronounced among labour migrants from outside the EU/EFTA, who are mainly highly skilled migrants.

**Labour market participation among labour migrants remains high even after a longer stay in the Netherlands.** After more than ten years, their participation rate is still comparable to that of Dutch employees without a migration background. This shows that there is hardly any dropout from the labour market among labour migrants who remain in the Netherlands.

**A quarter of male labour migrants from within the EU/EFTA and one third of female labour migrants earn no more than 30% above the statutory minimum wage.** However, the share of workers with a low wage declines rapidly with longer residence. After five years, the likelihood of earning a low wage is about the same as that of the average employee in the Netherlands.

**Among labour migrants from outside the EU/EFTA, 58% earn at least 250% of the statutory minimum wage.** This group largely consists of highly skilled migrants, who are required to meet a wage threshold in order to be employed in the Netherlands. After seven years, the share with a high wage rises to 80%, but after ten years it decreases somewhat, possibly because the highest-earning highly skilled migrants may have left the Netherlands by then.

**More labour migrants obtain a permanent contract after five years of residence.** While most initially have a flexible contract, after five years 63% of EU/EFTA labour migrants and 76% of non-EU/EFTA labour migrants hold a permanent contract. Almost all labour migrants work at least 35 hours per week, including women. This means that there is no untapped labour potential in terms of hours worked.

## 6.5 Study migrants

**For study migrants, the untapped labour potential almost entirely disappears once they have been in the Netherlands for more than five years.** While they are still enrolled in education, their labour market participation remains low, but those who stay after graduation generally find work quickly. Statistically, individuals are still classified as *study migrants* even if they have completed their education many years ago.

**Employed study migrants often start with low-paid jobs, especially while studying, but this decreases rapidly after more than five years of residence in the Netherlands.** Initially, study migrants almost always hold a flexible contract, but the share with flexible employment decreases steadily with their length of stay in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, study migrants from within the EU/EFTA still have relatively high rates of flexible contracts even after more than ten years of residence. Male study migrants are more likely to work part-time than Dutch men without a migration background, most likely because they often combine work with their studies.

## Contents

### Summary

1. [What is meant by the 'untapped labour potential of migrants'?](#)
2. [Scale of untapped labour potential among migrants](#)
3. [Untapped labour potential by country of origin](#)
4. [Untapped labour potential by migration motive](#)
5. [Quality of migrants' employment](#)
6. [Insights into the untapped labour potential of migrants](#)
  - 6.1 Asylum migrants
  - 6.2 Ukrainian displaced persons
  - 6.3 Family migrants
  - 6.4 Labour migrants
  - 6.5 Study migrants

## 7. Policy considerations

## 7. Policy considerations

This study highlights several key considerations for policies aimed at tapping into the untapped labour potential of migrants.

### Tapping into talent

- Ensure that **greater policy attention** is directed towards tapping into the untapped labour potential of migrants who are already in the Netherlands.
- The extent of **untapped potential varies considerably** between migrant groups depending on age, gender, migration motive and country of origin. Particular attention is therefore needed for migrants aged 45 and over, women, and asylum and family migrants from outside the EU.
- The largest share of untapped labour potential is found among **asylum migrants and family migrants**. Policies targeting these groups offer the greatest scope for impact.

### Education

- **Investing in Dutch language skills** is essential to improve migrants' prospects in the labour market (see also the report of the Advisory Council on Migration and the English summary [Investing in Living Together](#)).
- **Education more broadly is crucial** to labour market opportunities. Providing training for migrants without a basic qualification can make an important contribution to reducing untapped potential.
- The **recognition of foreign qualifications** has a positive effect on labour market participation, particularly for women.

### Job matching and access to work

- For most migrant groups, untapped labour potential decreases with length of stay. However, for asylum and family migrants this decline is slow, and their labour participation fluctuates strongly with unemployment levels. Policies should therefore focus on **accelerating their integration into the labour market**.
- As the likelihood of paid work rises considerably when a partner is in employment, **policies should address both partners** rather than focusing solely on the permit holder or asylum seeker.
- The labour participation of female migrants is also influenced by their views on gender roles. Other research shows that additional barriers, such as prejudice and discrimination, also play a role in securing work.

This underlines the importance of engaging directly with non-working women about **what they need in order to be able to take up employment**.

### Investing in work

- Most working migrants do not work fewer hours but, in fact, **more hours than comparable Dutch workers without a migration background**. There is therefore generally no untapped potential in terms of hours worked, and no special policy focus is required in this regard.
- There is no untapped labour potential among labour migrants and study migrants (after completing their studies). However, **their talents often do not appear to be fully realised**.
- There appears to be significant **qualitative untapped potential** among working migrants in terms of pay and contract type. Although earnings and job security improve over time, more attention should be given to ensuring that migrants' skills are fully tapped into. This would help more migrants move into jobs that match their competencies and aspirations, while also benefiting the Netherlands.

The extent to which migrant talent is tapped into also depends heavily on **employers**. Their role has not yet been explored in this study. Follow-up qualitative research will focus on identifying the key barriers and enabling factors for better tapping into the labour potential of migrants.

### Methodology

This study is largely based on published statistics on migrants from Statistics Netherlands (in Dutch: *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*, or CBS). The definition of the migrant population, the age boundaries applied, and the categorisation of migration motives are therefore based on the classifications used by CBS, and do not necessarily reflect the preferences of the Advisory Council on Migration. Additional analyses were carried out using microdata from the 2020 *Survey Integration Minorities (SIM)* conducted by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). SIM contains data on migrants from Morocco, Turkey, Suriname, the Caribbean Netherlands, Poland, Somalia, and Iran.

This publication is based on the exploratory *Tapping into talent: the untapped labour potential of migrants. A statistical analysis* (available in Dutch). This study provides a more detailed explanation of the analyses and data concerning the untapped labour potential of migrants.

## The Advisory Council on Migration

The Advisory Council on Migration is an independent statutory body that advises the government and parliament on migration in the broadest sense. Its advisory and knowledge outputs concern legislation, policy and strategy.

## Colophon

This factsheet is based on the study *Tapping into talent: the untapped labour potential of migrants. A statistical analysis*, published on the website of the Advisory Council on Migration. Both are part of the advisory project *Tapping into talent: migrants and paid employment*.

## Project Group

Paul de Beer (Coordinating Council Member)  
Helga de Valk (Council Member)  
Jos Wienen (Council Member)  
Anita Strockmeijer (Staff, Project Leader)  
Selin Tuzgöl (Staff)

The Hague, June 2025

Adviesraad Migratie

Postbus 20011

2500 EA Den Haag

[www.adviesraadmigratie.nl](http://www.adviesraadmigratie.nl)

[secretariaat@adviesraadmigratie.nl](mailto:secretariaat@adviesraadmigratie.nl)

+31 6 46 84 09 07

