

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE · OCTOBER 2026

Ambition, part-time

Building an HR career with a family

For HR professionals who want to grow without working full-time. What the figures show, where the pressure points are, and what you, your team and your organisation can do about it.

1.87 million

workers in the Netherlands with a large part-time job of 28 to 35 hours, 240,000 more than in 2021

28.2 hours

a week on average for mothers with a child under 12; fathers work 40.2 hours

36%

of the HR professionals surveyed had burnout within five years

IN BRIEF

Growing without going full-time

For many parents in the Netherlands, part-time work is the norm, yet careers are often still designed around full-time hours. HR professionals also work in a field that is becoming more demanding. How do you combine the two without giving up your ambition?

1

The large part-time job is becoming the norm

1.87 million people work 28 to 35 hours. Among mothers with a partner, that share rose from 27.4% to 31.4%; among fathers, from 11.5% to 13.3% (2021 to 2025).

2

Careers are still designed around full-time work

According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), hours worked and overtime are strongly linked to progression into management roles, and even more strongly to progression to the top.

3

Many workers actually want fewer hours

17.1% of working men and 13.9% of working women want to work fewer hours. Men who want this would ideally go from an average of 41.7 to 28.8 hours.

4

HR is under extra pressure

In a poll of 500 Dutch HR professionals, 36% said they had experienced burnout in the past five years. 40% were considering leaving the sector within a year.

5

Part-time ambition is a design question

It calls for choices from you, from the HR team and from the organisation: managing by results, dividing work smartly and thinking of careers in phases.

Working part-time is not a lack of ambition but a different allocation of time. The question is whether organisations design their careers around that.

HOW TO READ THIS

Chapters 1 to 3 set out the facts. Chapters 4 to 6 cover what you, your team and your organisation can do. Chapters 7 and 8 are a worksheet and a conversation guide. Chapter 9 translates it all into policy for everyone.

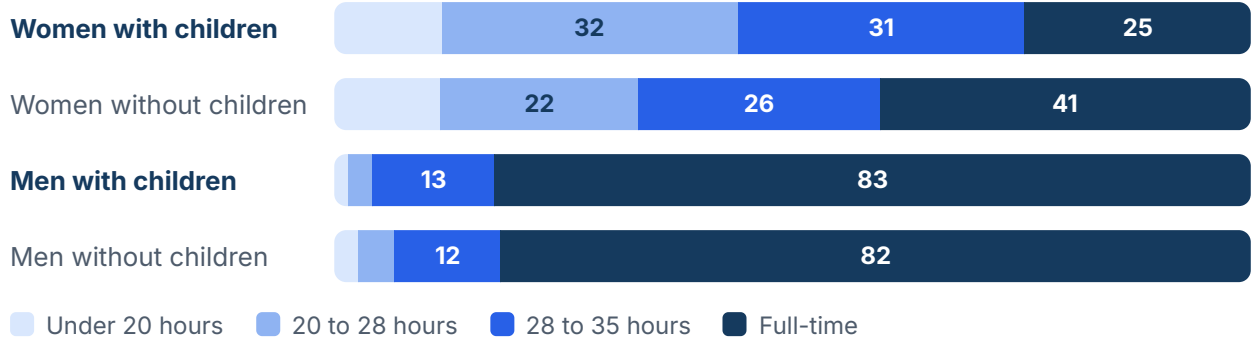
CHAPTER 1

The part-time reality

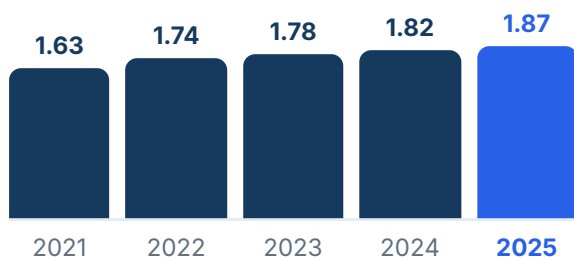
Having children shifts the working week, especially for mothers. At the same time, one form is growing fast: the large part-time job of 28 to 35 hours, among fathers too.

How many hours do people with a partner work?

% of workers aged 25 to 65, hours per week · CBS · third quarter of 2025



WORKERS ON 28 TO 35 HOURS



Million workers, third quarter · CBS

WHY PART-TIME?

Mothers, child under 12 97%

Fathers, child under 12 91%

Share of part-time working parents who give childcare as the reason (CBS, 2024).

ESPECIALLY RELEVANT FOR HR

Highly educated women work full-time more often than average: 44.9% of those with a higher professional or university degree (hbo, wo), against 26.4% with upper secondary or vocational education (havo, vwo, mbo 2 to 4; CBS, 2023). So among the highly educated, part-time work is less of a given: those who work fewer hours often do so by deliberate choice.

CHAPTER 2

Where hours and ambition collide

The Netherlands combines a lot of part-time work with careers that still often run on hours and presence. You can see this in who moves up.

SCP · 2020

Hours and overtime decide who moves up

For women, hours worked and overtime are most strongly linked to progression into management roles, and even more strongly to progression to the top. 60 to 70% of the women in the study held no management role during the entire period.

RUSSO AND HASSINK · 2008

The gap grows through missed promotions

Part-timers are promoted less often than full-timers. The difference is not there at the start of a career, but builds up as promotions fail to come. An older Dutch study, describing a mechanism that is still recognisable.

Meanwhile, many people actually want fewer hours

Workers who want to work less: current and desired hours per week · CBS · 2023

Men

17.1% of workers

41.7 → 28.8 hours**Women**

13.9% of workers

34.0 → 24.6 hours

So if you keep careers open only to full-timers, you exclude not only parents but also a large share of the people who still work full-time today.

29.1%

of managers in the Netherlands are women, compared with 26% in 2014 (CBS, 2023).

FOUR MECHANISMS BEHIND THE COLLISION**Presence norm:** being there is what counts**Overtime as proof** of commitment and ambition**Leadership** seen as a full-time role**Timing:** promotion opportunities and young children often coincide

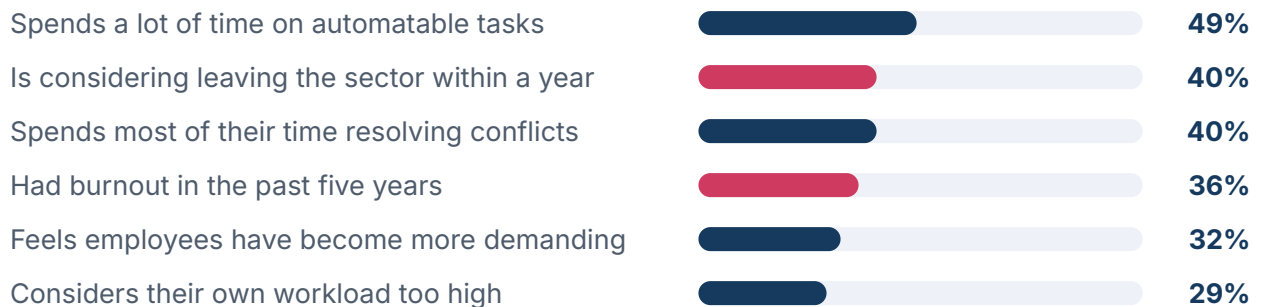
CHAPTER 3

Why HR is under extra pressure

HR absorbs the tensions of the whole organisation: absenteeism, conflicts, reorganisations. Combine that with a family and you carry a double load.

What HR professionals say themselves

Poll of 500 HR professionals in the Netherlands · December 2024



Conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Personio. A commercial poll: read the figures as a signal, not as a representative picture.

FOUR TENSIONS FOR HR PROFESSIONALS WITH A FAMILY



Always on call

A conflict or a sick report does not wait for your working day. Without clear agreements, your day off quietly fills up.



Work you take home

Dismissal, illness and conflict are emotional work. You cannot switch that off when you pick up the children.



Visible where decisions are made

A strategic role requires presence in the management team. If that meeting falls on your day off, others decide.



The cobbler's children

HR writes the policy on balance and flexibility, but by no means always uses it itself.

Tensions drawn from the practice of HR professionals, not measurement results.

CHAPTER 4 · YOU

Four design principles for your own career

You do not have to wait for the organisation to sort it out. These four principles help you make ambition with fewer hours visible and sustainable. The label shows how strong the evidence is (page 9).

1

Manage by results, not hours**Moderate evidence**

If you are present less, you need to be more visible in what gets achieved.

Do: agree three results per quarter with your manager and share a brief progress update every month.

2

Set your rhythm and boundaries**Moderate evidence**

People differ in how strictly they separate work and private life. Choose agreements that suit you, and make them known.

Do: fixed working days, guaranteed presence on management team days and a clear rule on availability on days off.

3

Craft your role **Strong evidence**

With job crafting, you adjust your own tasks, contacts and resources so that your hours go to the work that adds the most value.

Do: drop, share or automate one administrative task per quarter and swap it for strategic work.

4

Think in seasons **Limited evidence**

A career is not a straight line. There are phases of building, of maintaining and of accelerating.

Do: name the season you are in and your ambition for the next two years (worksheet, chapter 7).

NOT JUST A BALANCE PROBLEM

Work and family do not only cost each other time; they also strengthen each other. Research on work-family enrichment shows that skills, energy and perspective from one role can improve the other. An HR professional with a family brings experience that makes policy better.

CHAPTER 5 · THE HR TEAM

Five team agreements that make the difference

A part-time HR career only works if the team around it is organised for it. Not with good intentions, but with agreements.

1

Cover for every day Moderate evidence

Agree who is the point of contact for urgent matters each day, such as a sick report, a conflict or an emergency. Only then is a day off truly off.

2

Handover as a routine Practice

A short, fixed handover at the end of your working week: ongoing cases, sensitive matters and what can wait.

3

Sharing roles Limited evidence

A job share or shared portfolio, for example for an HR business partner or HR manager: two people, one role, with a clear division.

4

Distributing heavy work deliberately Practice

Spread emotionally demanding cases, such as dismissal, conflict and long-term absenteeism, across the whole team instead of leaving them with one person.

5

Fixed meeting days Practice

Schedule team meetings and the key management team moments on days when everyone works.

A JOB SHARE WORKS WHEN

the division of tasks is clear to everyone;
there is one shared calendar and case file;
there is a fixed overlap moment every week;
the pair is assessed together on results;
there is one point of contact per topic.

TEAM AGREEMENT

Fill in

In our team, a day off means:

CHAPTER 6 · THE ORGANISATION

What the organisation needs to arrange

Personal strategies do not last long if the organisation keeps designing careers around full-time work. Four levers that the board and HR work on together.

1 Reward impact Moderate evidence

Assess on results and contribution, not on visibility or overtime.

2 Part-time leadership Limited evidence

Open management roles at 32 hours or as a job share, as standard, not as an exception.

3 Careers in phases Limited evidence

Room to scale down temporarily and scale up again, without falling off the promotion track.

4 Lead by example Strong evidence

Directors and managers who make their own boundaries visible give others room.

What Dutch law already provides

Dutch Flexible Working Act (Wet flexibel werken)

After six months of employment, you can request more or fewer hours in writing, at least two months in advance. The employer decides no later than one month before the start date and may only refuse on serious business or service grounds. If you care for a child under 8, this also applies at small employers, and you do not have to wait a year after a previous request.

Parental leave

Every parent is entitled to 26 weeks of parental leave. Nine of those weeks are paid, at 70% of the daily wage up to a maximum, if you take them in the child's first year.

Source: Dutch government (Rijksoverheid), October 2026. Check current conditions before you apply.

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE BOARD

Can all our management roles be done in 32 hours?

Do we know how many part-timers move up?

Do we assess promotions on results or on hours?

Who on the board shows their own boundaries?

EVIDENCE BASE

What works, and how strong is the evidence?

What the evidence labels in chapters 4 to 6 are based on.

MEASURE	WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS	EVIDENCE
Managers who support work and private life	Meta-analysis, 85 studies: specific support for work and private life is more strongly linked to less work-family conflict than general support. <i>Kossek et al., 2011</i>	Strong
Job crafting	Meta-analysis, 122 samples: linked to engagement, satisfaction and performance. Only cutting tasks does not help; combine it with new challenges. <i>Rudolph et al., 2017</i>	Strong
Control over working time and managing by results	Randomised study: more control over working time plus manager training slightly reduced work-family conflict, without extra working hours. <i>Kelly, Moen et al., 2014</i>	Moderate
Boundaries and availability	Detaching from work is linked to less exhaustion. Even the expectation of checking email after hours increases strain, for partners too. <i>Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, 2017; Becker et al., 2018</i>	Moderate
Promoting on results	Study at a consultancy firm: those who openly worked less were marginalised. Visible availability was rewarded, not performance. <i>Reid, 2015; SCP, 2020</i>	Moderate
Flexibility in time and place	Meta-analysis: linked to less work-family conflict, but the effect is small. Flexibility alone is not enough. <i>Allen et al., 2013</i>	Moderate
Job sharing and part-time leadership	Mainly case studies with positive experiences; hard impact measurements are still lacking. <i>Watton and Stables, 2016</i>	Limited
Career in seasons	Theory on work-family enrichment and career practice: a framework for thinking, not a tested intervention. <i>Greenhaus and Powell, 2006</i>	Limited

HOW WE RATE THE EVIDENCE

Strong: meta-analyses. **Moderate:** a single randomised study, small effects or qualitative research.

Limited: case studies or theory. **Practice:** shared experience, no research of its own. Most research was done outside HR and outside the Netherlands.

CHAPTER 7 · WORKSHEET

My ambition, my hours

Fill in this worksheet before your conversation with your manager (chapter 8). It takes fifteen minutes.

A · WHICH SEASON AM I IN?

☐ **Building**

Home demands a lot right now. I keep my skills up to date and lay a foundation.

☐ **Maintaining**

I am in a good place. I deepen my role and choose deliberately what I take on.

☐ **Accelerating**

I want to grow: more responsibility, a next role.

B · MY CHOICES

My ambition two years from now

.....

.....

What is non-negotiable for me at home

.....

.....

Three results I want to be assessed on this quarter

- 1
.....
- 2
.....
- 3
.....

One task I will drop, share or automate

.....

What I need from my manager

.....

.....

A season is not a final destination. Every six months, look again at which season fits, and say it out loud.

CHAPTER 8 · CONVERSATION GUIDE

The conversation with your manager

Six topics for one conversation about ambition and hours. For each topic, a question to ask in return, so that it becomes a conversation rather than a request.

1 My ambition: where I want to be in two years

Ask in return: what do you see as my next step?

2 My hours and rhythm: what my ideal week looks like

Ask in return: where do you see bottlenecks?

3 Results: what I want to be assessed on

Ask in return: which result matters most to you?

4 Availability on my days off

Ask in return: who covers for me when I am off?

5 Visibility in key decisions

Ask in return: which meetings must I not miss?

6 A review after three months

Ask in return: when shall we schedule it?

PREPARE

Fill in the worksheet (chapter 7).

Put your proposal on one A4 page.

Start with what the team and the organisation gain.

DURING

Be specific about days and results.

Listen to concerns and address them in your proposal.

WRAP UP

Confirm the agreements in writing.

Schedule the review straight away.

And if the answer is no?

Ask for the reason and what it would take to say yes. Propose a three-month trial period with a fixed review. If it concerns your hours, the Dutch Flexible Working Act offers a formal route: a refusal must be given in writing and justified by a serious interest.

CHAPTER 9 · THE MIRROR

What applies to HR applies to everyone

Parents, carers and people who simply want to work less all run into the same questions. What HR arranges for itself is also a blueprint for policy.

FOR YOURSELF

Managing by results

Cover and handover in the HR team

Your career in seasons

The conversation with your manager

FOR THE ORGANISATION

→ **Assessing and promoting on results**

→ **Team agreements in every department**

→ **Career policy with scaling down and up**

→ **A regular talk about hours and ambition**

HOW DEEPLER HELPS



Deepler Research

Measures per team how people experience workload, flexibility and career prospects.



Deepler 360

Shows whether managers lead on results and give room.



Deepler Journeys

Measures the experience at moments in the employee journey, such as returning from leave.



Deepler Culture

Reveals whether your culture runs on presence or on results.

How do your people experience the balance?

Schedule an exploratory conversation with the Knowledge centre.

deepler.io

METHODOLOGY

Sources

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What we do not claim. CBS figures cover all workers, not HR specifically. The HR figures come from a commercial poll and are a signal. There is no right or wrong choice of hours: the choice remains personal.

ABOUT THE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Deepler's Knowledge centre brings together insights from science and HR practice on healthier work, better collaboration and careers that fit people. Better performance through better listening.

Do we measure ambition by hours, or by what someone contributes?