



# How to reach vulnerable groups for career guidance in the Netherlands?

# COLOFON

## TITLE

Exploration Study | How do we reach vulnerable target groups for career guidance in the Netherlands?

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# SUMMARY

In the Netherlands, there are currently many developments in the field of career guidance and lifelong learning, but vulnerable target groups do not always make use of them yet. This exploration study therefore investigates the ways in which vulnerable target groups are reached in the Netherlands to encourage them to make more use of career guidance.

This main question was answered through a literature review of recent initiatives and public policy on career guidance. In addition, six experts were interviewed about the current situation.

This exploration study shows that there is a need for more cooperation, better information supply and insight into private initiatives. In addition, there is no clarity on when someone falls under a vulnerable target group. In policy and practice, various vulnerable target groups are distinguished, such as people with a language barrier or people with an employment restriction, but this term covers more target groups. Experts in most cases do not focus specifically on one target group, but do distinguish different vulnerable target groups.

To better reach, motivate and guide vulnerable target groups, several success factors emerge from the literature and interviews. These include: paying more attention to the preliminary process, small interventions, physically and emotionally connecting with the target group, offering space within the work and certification. Besides success factors, challenges also emerge such as subsidy schemes that are not always set up for vulnerable target groups and the lack of a clear structure for learning and working.

The results of this exploration study lead to the following recommendations:

- 1.** Create overview of initiatives and improve information provision.
- 2.** Make sure training offerings are compatible with work and can be combined.
- 3.** Connect physically and emotionally with the target audience.
- 4.** Consider the context.

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# 1



# INTRODUCTION

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problem Statement

In the Netherlands, there are currently many developments in the field of career guidance and lifelong learning, such as the STAP scheme<sup>1</sup>, *NL leert door* and the *individuele leerrekeningen* (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022). The problem, however, is that precisely those groups that need career guidance the most make the least use of it. This may have several reasons: possibly these groups have difficulty finding these schemes or do not see the need for retraining and upskilling (Elderenbosch et al., 2022).

Through an earlier exploration study by Euroguidance (Elderenbosch et al., 2022), we mapped which methods and approaches other European countries use to reach different vulnerable target groups for career guidance as we noticed that many countries face the same dilemmas as the Netherlands. In this context it is important to look at the definition of the concept 'vulnerable target groups'. Currently, no unambiguous definition can be found. In order to learn from other countries, it is important to know what the current situation is in the Netherlands. This exploration study therefore builds on the previous exploration study.

Although career guidance in the Netherlands takes place in both education and the labour market (Euroguidance, 2022), this study only focuses on the labour market. In the Netherlands, career guidance in education is institutionalised and thus in principle reaches most - or all - young people, while in labour market guidance the initiative generally lies with the individual employee or job seeker. Moreover, in the labour market there are many different career guidance providers and the situation is therefore less straightforward (Euroguidance, 2022). This is also in line with the choice made in the previous survey (Elderenbosch et al., 2022).

<sup>1</sup>) At the time of this investigation, the STAP scheme was in place.

Through the previous exploration study, we gained insight into what is important in reaching vulnerable target groups in the literature and methods and approaches to do so in other European countries. This was investigated through a literature review and interviews with experts in five European countries about the experiences in their countries. The literature reveals important drivers, motivations and challenges for participating in career development offerings. If we then look at practice, we see firstly that European countries identify similar yet different target groups. So it seems to depend on the context. It also differs per country whether and how a categorisation into target groups determines the communication campaign. In addition, it emerges that both online and physical strategies are deployed to reach certain target groups. The purpose of this exploration study is therefore twofold: (1) to gain more insight into the policy and communication choices made in the Netherlands around career guidance for vulnerable target groups aimed at the labour market, and (2) to make practical recommendations to better reach vulnerable target groups and inform other countries within the Euroguidance network about this.

## **1.2 Main and sub-questions**

This leads to the following main question: in what ways are vulnerable target groups reached in the Netherlands to encourage them to make more use of career guidance? To answer the main question, we answer the following sub-questions:

- 1.** What does the structure of career guidance for vulnerable target groups in the Netherlands look like?
- 2.** Which vulnerable target groups are distinguished in career guidance in the Netherlands?
- 3.** What policy and communication choices are career experts making in practice to reach vulnerable target groups?
- 4.** What are the successes and challenges in practice in reaching vulnerable target groups for career guidance?
- 5.** What are practical examples of initiatives to reach and motivate vulnerable target groups for career guidance?

### **1.3 Research method**

To answer these main and sub-questions, we conducted both desk research and interviews with experts. All quotes in this exploration study are translated from Dutch to English.

#### **Activity one: desk research**

Desk research was used to answer sub-questions one and two. Desk research helped to get an overview of recent initiatives to reach vulnerable target groups for career guidance and lifelong learning. We looked at the most up-to-date information on the websites of trade unions, industry organisations, central government and implementing agencies. The private landscape is diverse and fragmented, making it too complex to map for this exploration study. For follow-up research, however, mapping the private providers is interesting.

#### **Activity two: interviews with career guidance experts**

To answer the remaining three subquestions, interviews were conducted with experts in the field of career guidance. Here, a semi-structured design was used. Indeed, this form of interviewing invites participants to talk at length about a topic and to adjust the direction of the interview if necessary (Cassel, 2009).

For the selection of participants, we spoke with experts working at various organisations (see table 1) to gain insight into the current situation, as in the Netherlands career guidance is offered by several private and public organisations (Euroguidance, 2022). We spoke to a total of six experts from four organisations during the period June 2022 to October 2022. Four of them work as (policy) advisors, one as a project coordinator and one as an experienced learning ambassador and union executive (see table 1).

**TABLE 1 - INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Function Participants</b>
Trade union	Labour market & organisation policy advisor
Branch organisation of schools and adult education	Policy advisor Strategy & Education Project Coordinator
Employment agency	Experienced learning ambassador and union executive
Regional partnership between public and private parties advising	National Consultant Services Consultant

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# **POLICY FRAMEWORK THE NETHERLANDS**

# 2. POLICY FRAMEWORK NETHERLANDS

*Chapter two of this exploration study answers the first two sub-questions. First, section 2.1 shows which vulnerable target groups are distinguished in Dutch policy. Then, section 2.2 describes the structure of career guidance for vulnerable target groups in the Netherlands. This section is based on the analysis of documents and is the basis for the policy as implemented. Section 2.3 answers the above sub-questions in the form of a sub-conclusion.*

## 2.1 Structure of career guidance

Several years of austerity, decentralisation and market-oriented reforms have had an impact on policy and the delivery of career guidance in the Netherlands (Cedefop, 2022). This has led to a situation where career guidance is provided by various organisations, both public and private (Cedefop, 2022; Euroguidance, 2022). As a result, there seems to be no clear structure for career guidance in the Netherlands. The recent Parliamentary Letter on Lifelong learning (LLL)<sup>2</sup> also highlights that the lack of transparency about the provisions of governments, sectors and regional public-private partnerships is a specific barrier to LLL (Ministry of General Affairs, 2022).

Euroguidance Netherlands, together with Noloc, Saxion/James CNV, UWV (the Dutch public employment service) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, wrote a position paper<sup>3</sup> arguing for more coherence, coordination and structural funding

2) <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2022/09/23/kamerbrief-beleidslijnen-leven-lang-ontwikkelen>

3) [https://www.euroguidance.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EG\\_positionpaper\\_dig150621.pdf](https://www.euroguidance.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EG_positionpaper_dig150621.pdf)

for career development for all citizens (Euroguidance Netherlands, 2021).

It is even more difficult to outline a structure for career guidance for vulnerable target groups, as it is often not defined what constitutes a vulnerable target group. Below we therefore describe - according to our findings - the main organisations and schemes for career guidance for vulnerable target groups.

### **Central government**

In recent years, the central government has invested in a strategy and policy to improve LLL and career guidance in both education and the labour market. With the new coalition agreement (of 2022), they intend to continue doing so with the aim of creating more coherence and clarity for all stakeholders on career development and lifelong learning (Cedefop, 2022).

The Dutch government wants to strengthen LLL by reducing bottlenecks and increasing the accessibility and transparency of available tools. Currently, there is no clear overview of the offerings in the field of LLL. In addition to the fragmentation of the offerings, the information about the current provisions seems to be inadequate. To improve this, the government is committed to three policies:

- 1. *People in development:*** public funding for training should be simplified and expanded. Appropriate information provision is therefore essential.
- 2. *Companies in development:*** to facilitate learning and development in the workplace, it is important that grant schemes are available to facilitate basic skills training and other forms of training.
- 3. *Educators in development:*** better matching of supply and demand is needed in matching individuals' educational backgrounds.

To realise these policies, the government is facilitating an investment of around €1.2 billion for involved stakeholders between 2022 and 2027. Looking at the investment in specifically vulnerable target groups (as we define the vulnerable target groups in section 2.2),

this money will be used for 1) individual training budget for the practically educated, 2) language and vocational skills for the low-literate, 3) improving information provision and finally 4) better coordination and alignment.

These policies aim to realise a strong and ambitious learning and development culture in the Netherlands, as a future-proof labour market simply cannot exist without it (Ministry of General Affairs, 2022). The government cannot do this without the employers' organisations, trade unions, branches and education and developments funds (*O&O fondsen*). They have the knowledge and experience to stimulate learning and development. These partners have indicated to take the initiative and direction to take an active, firm and executive role in shaping and implementing LLL policy. There are two main lines that are considered important for a strong learning and development culture:

1. That tools are available and findable; understanding of all initiatives.
2. Strengthening motivation and urgency for learning and development.

With the new policy on LLL and career guidance, we see more intensive coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, social partners, schools and other relevant organisations. Government funds have been used for limited career guidance within the labour market. Additional financial input is mostly provided by pilots, incidental measures and subsidies (Cedefop, 2022).

Part of the new policy on LLL is a new way of granting subsidies. As a start, the government aims to encourage people to take control of their own careers to be able to continue their personal development and making their own choices. In this context, LLL plays an important role. People have access to subsidies that can be used for training and development so that they remain sustainably employed in the labour market (Cedefop, 2022).

New subsidy schemes in the field of career guidance and LLL include the STAP scheme and



subsidy scheme *NL Leert Door* (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022). However, the problem is that precisely those groups that need career guidance the most make the least use of these schemes. Possibly these groups have difficulty finding these schemes or do not see the need for retraining and upskilling (Elderenbosch et al., 2022). Four commonly used schemes are described below, followed by a description of organisations involved in LLL.

### **Scheme 1: STAP Scheme<sup>4</sup>**

*Target group:* Anyone between 18 years and state pension age with a link to the labour market.

The government has developed the STAP scheme to give people the financial opportunity to invest in their development. Employees and the unemployed can apply for a personal budget of up to €1,000 annually for training or education.

STAP stands for Stimulating Labour Market Position. Practitioners with a diploma up to MBO level 2<sup>5</sup> can also visit a registered career coach for €700 (Cedefop, 2022; Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022). This grant is available from the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2022 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022). By 2022, 15,000 developmental counselling sessions of 700 euros per counselling session will be available (Cedefop, 2022).

There are some conditions for the STAP scheme. For example, you must be 18 years or older and not yet receive retirement pensions. Also, the training, course or education must be part of the STAP training register and you must not yet have started at the time you apply for the STAP scheme. If the application is approved, the amount is paid to the training provider. The UWV manages and executes the applications (Cedefop, 2022; Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022).

4) The STAP budget will continue in modified form. The cabinet will use the remaining STAP budget more specifically for training that trains for the labour market from September 2023. At the time of publishing this reconnaissance, the cabinet is now investigating how this can be properly implemented.

5) You can find more information on secondary vocational education (in Dutch: *middelbaar beroepsopleiding*, MBO) on [the website of Nuffic](#).

## **Scheme 2: Nederland Leert Door<sup>6</sup>**

*Target group:* Anyone between 18 years and retirement age with a link to the labour market.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government set up a crisis policy on LLL. The subsidy scheme Nederland Leert Door is part of these measures and offers free training for everyone from 18 years to retirement age. More than 65,000 training courses became available in 2020 and 2021. Another 54,000 were added until the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 (Cedefop, 2022; Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). The measure ended on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2022 and it is still unclear whether these measures will continue beyond 2022 (Cedefop, 2022). They are therefore temporary measures from the supplementary social package for support, guidance and training in the transition to other work. In addition, the subsidy scheme *NL Leert Door* with the use of tailor-made-training per employment sector - the opportunity to provide career development advice, training and guidance to current and future workers in a particular sector (central government, n.d.).

## **Scheme 3: Filling learning rights (funds from coalition agreement)**

*Target group:* people with up to a EQF level 4 diploma.

The aim is to deploy additional training funding for people with little initial training. This budget will be €125 million annually (including implementation costs) and will run from 2023 to 2026 (Ministry of General Affairs, 2022).

## **Scheme 4: LLL Collective Low Educated & Low Literate**

The LLL Collective Low-educated & Low-literate plan will receive €7.6 million from the National Growth Fund over the next few years. The aim of the plan is to give low-skilled and low-literate people a better position in the labour market by investing in new training (Cedefop, 2022; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> To support the Emergency Measure Bridging Employment 2 (NOW 2), the temporary crisis package NL Leert Door had been set up. These free training programmes ran until 31 March 2023.

An LLL Collective for the low-skilled and low-literate will be set up in the various labour market regions, in which the UWV, municipalities, trainers and employers will work together to develop an appropriate training offer based on the needs and opportunities of the low-skilled and low-literate (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2022).

The LLL Collective of the Lowly Educated and Lowly Literate has four specific target groups: (1) unemployed people doing unskilled or low-skilled work, (2) employed people doing unskilled or low-skilled work, (3) people with a great distance to the labour market and (4) people doing part-time, unskilled or low-skilled work (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2022).

## **Municipalities**

Municipalities are responsible for people receiving benefits under the Participation Act and for jobseekers without entitlement to benefits.

## **Participation Act**

The Participation Act has existed since 2015. It includes anyone who can access the labour market but need support to do so (Cedefop, 2022; Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2019): 'the Participation Act gives municipalities more responsibilities and opportunities to help people with an occupational disability or people with a large distance to the labour market find work and keep them employed' (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2019, p. 1). Divosa is the organisation for municipal directors for social services. They support municipalities in developing and exchanging knowledge with the aim of enabling people to actively participate in society (Cedefop, 2022; Divosa, n.d).

Basic services offered by municipalities usually consist of some form of supervision or support, such as help with preparing a CV or finding a job, mediation between a job seeker and employers, checking whether the beneficiary meets established job search criteria or decides which tools or services will be used for a particular person (Smulders, 2018).

## **UWV**

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment commissions the UWV to implement employee insurance schemes. One of the UWV's five divisions is 'UWV WERKbedrijf', which deals with job placement and reintegration (Cedefop, 2022). The UWV's career guidance services mainly focus on vulnerable students and unemployed adults (Cedefop, 2022; Euroguidance, 2022). Dutch policies increasingly focus on self-reliance and responsibility of job seekers within the Netherlands. As a result, services are increasingly based on online self-service (Cedefop, 2022). The UWV online services are available to all jobseekers at [www.werk.nl](http://www.werk.nl). On this portal, every jobseeker has access to their individual digital workbook. This is a personalised file where people can post their CV and find job vacancies. And if people receive unemployment benefits, they can also contact a work adviser if they need additional help in finding work for example. [www.werk.nl](http://www.werk.nl) contains even more different services, such as taking online tests, attending training courses and webinars, finding training or courses, reading articles, tips and tools for finding a job and the various terms and conditions of contracts (UWV, n.d.-a). For specific target groups, the UWV offers additional services: to people receiving unemployment benefits and specifically people aged 56 or older, people aged 27 or younger and former top athletes. In addition, the UWV offers additional job search support opportunities for people who receive a Wajong benefit (a benefit for youth with disability) who are able to work, people at risk of losing their jobs and people who experience barriers to the labour market (UWV, n.d.-b).

## **Leerwerkloketten**

The Leerwerkloketten have existed since August 2005 - commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment - and are independent partnerships between municipalities, Regional VET centers and the UWV (Leerwerkloket, n.d.). The Leerwerkloketten are available to anyone who seeks independent career and training advice free of charge: employed people, employers, students and jobseekers with or without social assistance. Each labour market region in the Netherlands has a Leerwerkloket. De Leerwerkloketten help people in various ways on the path of lifelong learning: 'The advisors of the Leerwerkloketten give labour market-relevant career and



training advice, take competency tests, help with preparing a CV and preparing job interviews, provide group information and help create regional apprenticeship pathways with entrepreneurs' (Leerwerkloket, n.d.). The national team of Leerwerkloketten facilitates and supports the 35 regional Leerwerkloketten with their communication, finance, strategy, policy and services (Cedefop, 2022).

## **Unions**

Trade unions, such as CNV and FNV, offer career guidance for their members and sometimes other target groups (Cedefop, 2022; CNV, n.d.; FNV, n.d.). For example, the FNV offers career consultations for people who are losing their jobs. During these consultations, they help with, for example, a CV check. In addition, there are career paths especially for FNV members, people who have been unemployed or threatened with unemployment for no longer than a year: 'together with a career path advisor, you draw up an action plan with your personal goals. You also determine the guidance period together and get to work. Your counsellor supports you in the process, while you take the steps to achieve your goals' (FNV, n.d.). As an FNV member, you can also take part in free career training courses and workshops. At CNV, you can contact a professional career counsellor for career advice, e-coaching or workshops (CNV, n.d.).

## **Private sector organisations**

Many organisations offer career guidance or similar services, usually for specific target groups and are (partly) funded by the government. In addition, many private companies and coaches offer career guidance for individuals, schools and reintegration programmes (Cedefop, 2022). Noloc is the Dutch professional association for career professionals and job coaches in the private market, with about 3,000 members (Cedefop, 2022; Noloc, n.d.).

## **2.2 Vulnerable target groups at career guidance**

From the analysis of policy documents (FNV, UWV, municipalities, central government), the following target groups emerge:

- Unemployed youth.

- People with a distance to the labour market, unable to earn the minimum wage.
- Former top athletes.
- People aged 56 or over.
- People aged 27 or younger.
- People who receive Wajong benefit; these are people who, even before their 17th birthday, have had to deal with an illness or disability that prevents them from finding work. From the age of 18, this person is entitled to Wajong benefit.
- People with a WSW indication: these are people who are moderately or severely occupationally disabled.
- People with IOW benefits; these are people who have not yet reached the AOW age, but are over 60 and have no work. IOW stands for Income Support for Older Unemployed Persons Act.
- People educated to EQF level 2; and level 3 and 4 (practically educated)
- People with work restrictions.

This does not clearly define what is meant by people with a distance to the labour market or what is meant by a vulnerable target group. These terms are often used as umbrella terms. In addition, similarities can be found between different target groups. For instance, people with a migration background are more often identified as a vulnerable target group because they have a greater distance to the labour market due to the language barrier and cultural differences. Section 2.1 provided more insight into the structure and initiatives around career guidance. Here, the above target groups emerge in some cases as target groups of the policy.

### **2.3 Sub-conclusion**

The above chapter answers the following sub-questions:

*'What does the structure of career guidance for vulnerable target groups in the Netherlands look like?'*

Policy analysis shows that there is no clear structure for career guidance. There are many different stakeholders for career guidance in the Netherlands. Because many different organisations are working on career guidance, the offer is fragmented and people sometimes cannot see the wood for the trees. There is a need for more cooperation between stakeholders, better information on current offerings and more insight into private initiatives.

*'Which vulnerable target groups are distinguished in career guidance in the Netherlands?'*

From a policy perspective, the following target groups are identified as vulnerable: people with a language barrier, older people (over 56), people with a work limitation and practically educated people (especially up to EQF level 2, but levels 3 and 4 are also mentioned in policy documents). Although many target groups are identified, these target groups are not necessarily referred to as a vulnerable target group. This term is used in this exploration study, but not in policy documents per se. Policy documents mainly refer to people with a distance to the labour market, but the characteristics of these individuals are not entirely clear.



# **VIEW OF PRACTICE**

# 3. VIEW OF PRACTICE

*This chapter provides insight into the policy and communication choices made in practice by career experts. It also identifies the success factors and bottlenecks that emerged from the interviews.*

## **3.1 Policy and communication choices**

### **3.1.1 Policy choices and implementation**

Both the union, trade associations, implementing agencies and the PPP (Public Private Partnership) focus on learning and working. Career guidance is in all cases a part of their services. For example, one of the experts explains that career guidance is an important component for them: *'Although various employers who offer career guidance, but we think it is very important that people can speak independent and open advice about their needs and challenges. If they can only do this with their employer, this is often less pleasant, because the employer has interests in and we don't.'* In addition, it is also important to the expert that the preliminary process is independent and accessible: *'With us, you can speak for an hour and that is nicer to do with someone who is at your side than within a dependency relationship with the employer.'*

Another expert describes how, at their organisation, they offer apprenticeship programmes in the broad sense. They also have an employment and language skills department. *'This way, we see the basic need of a person, so we can match the person's need.'*

### **3.1.2 Distinction in (vulnerable) target groups**

Who do the different organisations target? For two of them, this is very broad, namely anyone with a training need. However, one organisation is involved in organising initiatives specifically aimed at vulnerable target groups, such as people with low levels of literacy and people with a distance to the labour market. One organisation focuses mainly on people with a distance to the labour market. The last organisation - acting in a branch organisation - indicates that this can vary by institution and sector.

The four organisations do not use the same definition for the term 'vulnerable target groups'. However, experts mention several vulnerable target groups in the interviews, including people with a language disadvantage, low-educated people, informal carers, people with mental vulnerability, people who want to retrain or retrain, people with a distance to the labour market, unemployed people, people threatened with unemployment, people who have become self-employed out of necessity, employees with a high risk that their jobs will disappear, people who are unable to get their starting qualification, people with a work-limiting disability, practically educated people and people who have been on welfare for a very long time.

Interestingly, the two organisations that do not distinguish between target groups in their policies do indicate that in practice they see different (vulnerable) target groups. For instance, one of the experts finds it striking that in practice mainly low-educated people are not interested in career guidance initiatives. This may have several causes, but she thinks it is mainly due to fear of failure: *'This is because it is a difficult target group to reach, as they often already have a poor self-image and negative experiences with learning. As a result, they have a fear of failure.'* She also indicates that, in general, the jobs these target groups hold generally do not allow employees to develop: *'People take on these so-called 'flexible jobs' to survive, which means you don't have the energy for retraining. And what about people who do physically demanding work, such as people in the meat industry. These people are very tired after work because they do physically demanding work during the day.'* According to her, these types of jobs leave little space to organise things. *'This is also something many of my colleagues point out.'* This shows that an organisation's policy can differ from practice in terms of differentiating between (vulnerable) target groups.

The list below reflects the vulnerable target groups identified in practice:

- People with low employment skills.
- People with limited language skills or a language deficiency.
- Care-takers.
- Practically educated; especially those without entry-level qualifications.
- Unemployed or people who may become unemployed due to job loss.
- People forced to become self-employed.
- People who rely on benefits for a long time.
- People with disabilities.
- Flex workers.
- People with low self-esteem or fear of failure.
- People with physically demanding jobs.

### **3.1.3 Communication choices**

How do organisations reach vulnerable target groups? This differs between organisations. Two experts indicate that word-of-mouth advertising works best to reach this target group or their initiatives for specifically vulnerable target groups. Furthermore, newsletters, leaflets and magazines are also used.

For the two other organisations, it works differently: one expert indicates that they reach people with a distance to the labour market via the municipality. The branch organisation also indicates that they receive information through the municipality, but how short the lines of communication are with the municipality and other agencies varies between organisations.

Being close to the target group – both emotionally and physically - seems to be important. Chapter four contains more information from good practices.

## **3.2 Success factors and challenges**

The interviews reveal a number of successes and challenges in motivating and guiding vulnerable target groups:

### **3.2.1 Success factors**

#### **Appropriate context for the target group**

The interviews reveal that – when offering career guidance for vulnerable target groups – the preliminary process needs is important. Buddies or 'learning ambassadors' who are close to the target group are for example ways to encourage people and to have more self-confidence. More information about learning ambassadors can be found in section 4.1. In addition, doing small interventions is named as a success because it is low-threshold and contributes to people's self-confidence. It is also important for vulnerable target groups to have a contact person. This can be anyone who can be take on role as a buddy or mentor. In addition, certification seems to be beneficial. It also seems important that the organisations allows their employees to work on their personal development. In terms of communication, it seems important to adapt to the target group: for some target groups social media might be good means of communication, but for others a physical help desk in the neighbourhood would be a better alternative.

#### **Skills for guidance**

The interviews reveal skills that are important when guiding and motivating vulnerable target groups: first of all, being able to listen to people and then respond to the questions they have is essential. Look at people's needs. For example, one of the participants says:

*'Look at the person and the person's need and address that. Look for the intrinsic motivation of the employee. You shouldn't immediately react negatively if something doesn't quite work right away. Get that employee motivated from within themselves.'*

In addition, it is important to take people seriously and let people know that no



question is crazy or strange. In addition, giving people a sense of self-worth and using a positive approach is very important. A participant accompanying people as a learning ambassador said:

*'Sometimes colleagues have very high ambitions that I know are not within their reach, but I do try to sort of encourage them without immediately destroying their ambitions. I hold up a mirror to them and give them a realistic picture so that they figure it out for themselves. The person finds out for themselves that something is not within their reach. For instance, I would suggest introducing try-out internships within the organisations so that people find out whether they fit in a certain environment or not. Let people gain practical experiences.'*

### **3.2.2 Challenges**

Interviews reveal that schemes like 'Nederland Leert Door' and the 'STAP budget' do not seem to work so well for vulnerable target groups. These schemes are designed in such a way that whoever comes first gets to use them. Especially vulnerable target groups sometimes take a bit longer to decide whether they need career guidance. By the time the preliminary process is complete, the budget has already run out, as these subsidies were used up within a day.

One of the participants indicates that in their organisation (which works with subsidies), it is an obstacle that there are only subsidies for pilot projects: *'At [the organisation], we sometimes run into the fact that there are very nice and effective pilots for colleagues, which are then not funded anymore. Setting up a project yourself is not always financially possible.'* To be able to follow through on such initiatives, the participant believes there is an important role for the government. In the context of LLL, it would be good if there is sufficient and structural funding so that a pilot can be continued if it proves to be a success.

Another participant indicated that there are new initiatives popping up all the time, but there is no clear structure or recognisable point for learning and working. Now the situation is very confusing: there are, for example, a lot of help desks, such as the Leerwerkloket, UWV and

a municipality. The new parliamentary letter on the new employment infrastructure working towards a regional work centre could help in this case.

### **3.3 Sub-conclusion**

This chapter answers the following sub-questions:

*'What policy and communication choices are career experts making in practice to reach vulnerable target groups?'*

All four organisations focus on learning and working, and career guidance is part of their services. The organisations seem to have a very broad orientation and do not focus very specifically on a target group. In practice, however, the experts can distinguish different (vulnerable) target groups. When looking at vulnerable target groups, there does not seem to be an unambiguous definition, but many examples arise from the interviews as to who might fall under a vulnerable target group.

*'What are the successes and challenges in practice in reaching vulnerable target groups for career guidance?'*

As shown in table 2, several success factors seem to be important in motivating and guiding vulnerable target groups: paying more attention to the preliminary process, small interventions, having a point of contact, certification and getting space from the organisation for development. In terms of communication choices, adapting to the target group seems important. Besides success factors, challenges also emerge from the interviews. First of all, subsidy schemes do not always seem to be designed for vulnerable target groups. In addition, a clear structure for learning and working is still lacking at the moment, although the new parliamentary letter on the new employment infrastructure could help in this case.

**TABLE 2 - PROMOTING AND IMPEDING FACTORS**

<b>Promoting</b>	<b>Obstruction</b>
Fixed point of contact for guidance	No structural funding
Certification	No clear communication towards too right target group.
Physical and emotional proximity (representativeness among supervisors)	Lack of overview of initiatives
Conversation skills such as listening and questioning	Still insufficient cooperation, with everyone reinventing the wheel themselves
Communication that matches the specific target group	
Coaching guidance	
Normalising requests for help	
People-centred counselling	
Independent and disinterested person	

# 4



# **PRACTICAL EXAMPLES HIGHLIGHTED**

# 4. PRACTICAL EXAMPLES HIGHLIGHTED

*In this chapter, we highlight two practical examples of initiatives to reach vulnerable target groups: learning ambassadors and the werkwinkel. This chapter thus answers the last sub-question.*

## 4.1 Learning Ambassadors

Practitioners and flex workers tend to make little use of training opportunities. This leads to a higher risk of dropping out and fewer opportunities for this target group. For vulnerable target groups, it is important to pay more attention to the preliminary process. The FNV does so by training learning ambassadors.

Learning ambassadors are employees who encourage their colleagues to develop. They may be colleagues who themselves have faced fear of failure, find learning difficult or have experienced barriers in their learning or working process. A learning ambassador, is, for instance, a colleague who has had training himself and wants to use that enthusiasm to encourage others to start doing a course or training as well. Their life story inspires their colleagues to actively engage in their own personal development and training. This offer is specifically aimed at people with learning anxiety. Because of the experience of the learning ambassadors, they are close to the target group. Additionally, they can collect information on employees' training needs.

Trade union executives recruit learning ambassadors. They target both union and non-union members. However, non-members are asked if they want to become members. The FNV Framework Academy is responsible for training learning ambassadors. This is a three-day training course.

An important aspect of learning ambassadors is that they are independent. The employee himself chooses to go for training. This is another reason why the union organises and trains the learning ambassadors. Thereby, learning ambassadors are persons who are a global reflection of the group of employees they will assist in terms of personal background and position. They are expected to be able to express themselves well orally, to listen, to have enough persuasiveness and empathy, to plan, organise, function and cooperate well within the network of active members.

The union plays an active role in this: they train the learning ambassadors. This is important for the learning ambassadors to be independent.

#### **4.1.1 Current situation**

Several projects with learning ambassadors have been launched. Pilots have been set up in municipalities and social development companies. In the Achterhoek region, a project is being set up with language ambassadors. In 2020, a project in metal and technology sector has been started. At different government levels, projects are being prepared.

FNV's pilot at a number of social development companies for learning ambassadors started in 2019 and it will run until summer 2022. There are currently seven learning ambassadors at six companies. They use the companies' communication channels, social media and they visit team meetings. They also visit departments to make themselves known.

#### **4.1.2 Preconditions**

To do this well, there are a number of preconditions important to consider. For instance, it is important that the employers believe in the idea of a learning ambassador, as both

the ambassadors and the employee need time and resources. For example, one learning ambassador says it is important that employers know that it is going to be long journey, it is an investment of time and that does cost money. There needs to be awareness that it is not just going to be just fun, but there is also going to be progress.

*'I have a colleague who used to struggle with language and he is now going to work on his language professionally. It did take time to get this person this far. That colleague then also becomes an ambassador within [the organisation] and is put in the picture in a positive way, so that people see that he also dared to take that step. That in turn creates a safe environment for others.'*

If the organisations provides enables the time investment, it can have a very positive effect. You also see learning ambassadors being used by employers to give shape to policy and reduce resistance.

One learning ambassador we spoke to indicated a number of things that are important in mentoring:

- 1.** First of all, experience from practitioners is very important to help and motivate people, especially when it comes to personal development.
- 2.** It is also important to build a relationship and trust. This requires time investment. For instance, the learning ambassador indicates that you need to build a relationship and trust first, before being very functional. For example, it often takes just one or two conversations to ensure that someone feels safe and can therefore be open enough to tell them what they struggle with and what the actual problems are they are facing: *'it is not an easy thing to be able to just say that you are not language proficient enough, or have difficulty with maths. So that bit of confidence-building is a time investment that is needed in any case.'*

## 4.2 Werkwinkel

In Utrecht – partly organised by the Leerwerkloketten – a so-called werkwinkel has been set up. The werkwinkel is a small-scale initiative that has now been running for two years and is deliberately located in neighbourhoods where a multidisciplinary approach is used, such as Overvecht, Zuidwest and in community centre De Nieuwe Jutter. It also holds consulting hours in local libraries, community centres and primary schools. Many ‘vulnerable’ people with a distance to the labour market live in these areas.

Because the werkwinkel is physically present in these neighbourhoods, contact with the target group is made more quickly than bodies such as the municipality or the UWV. People with a distance to the labour market are often less likely to turn to formal bodies such as the municipality or UWV for help. One reason for this is that they often have negative experiences or a negative image of these institutions. Similarly, ‘vulnerable people’ do not always report to the Apprenticeship Centres either. Partly because they often have negative experiences with learning or have a learning gap. For instance, one expert explains: *‘if you have a negative school experience, you are not going to be the first to report to an Apprenticeship Centre, because the word ‘learning’ is already in the brand name. So that does create a barrier. And then they can report to the Overvecht werkwinkel’*

Several parties are present in the werkwinkel, such as the municipality, the UWV, the Leerwerkloket and community care. However, they are not present with a label - the brand name - of the organisation they belong to, but simply are present on behalf of the werkwinkel. This choice is made deliberately to be low-threshold.

It is a living room-like setting, to make more accessible. The practitioners are not sitting behind a laptop – which normally looks like they are registering everything - but instead they engage in conversation with people. The questions people ask are often primarily about work, but sometimes there is another question underneath the surface: *‘if people have debts, for example, they are not going to talk about that at first. But if you start talking to people a couple of times, a relationship of trust develops, and then after the*

*third or fourth interview you find out that they have other problems as well and are not just looking for work. '*

The werkwinkel also includes community care organisations and debt relief, which can be called in right away. A diverse group of people are visiting the werkwinkel. However, the interviewees indicate that especially people with a migration background and/or people who experience barriers to the labour market come by.

#### **4.2.1 Role of the Leerwerkloketten at the werkwinkel**

The Leerwerkloket is one of the organisations involved in the werkwinkel. The Leerwerkloket is able to provide help and advice, since they know what training opportunities and apprenticeships are available, but can only advise a client. They have no resources to buy anything. Nor do they have expertise in, for example, employment disability or debt. Because they solely have this information and advice function, they can refer people to the right organisations in a very targeted way.

Although staff from the Leerwerkloketten were also in the *front office* of the werkwinkel in the beginning, they are now in the back office. That turned out to be a better role for them after all, because the people who come to the werkwinkel do not have an immediate need for learning, but often just want to work. However, to qualify for a job, they often need additional training. They need for example to improve their language skills - in which case they will take a language course - or in the form of voluntary work to get started or to gain skills. The Leerwerkloketten provide advice in such cases, but in that case they also quickly liaise with the municipality to make it happen. They also communicate quickly with community care, because they also do home visits.

In addition, we see a lot of underlying issues: people want to work, but there are other problems that need to be solved before they can actually start working. The Leerwerkloketten are not set up to have those kinds of conversations with people, because the focus primarily on learning and working. However, the Leerwerkloketten can refer people in those cases to the right organisations.

So the Leerwerkloketten play an important role in the werkwinkel with vulnerable target groups, but only at a later stage, because the underlying issues need to be addressed first and the learning and working comes later. They can also give very targeted advice on learning and working and refer them to the right organisations when needed.

#### **4.2.2 Communication choices of the werkwinkel**

Much communication about the werkwinkel goes via word-of-mouth. This was a very conscious decision: social media are not much used by the target group. They started with leaflets in the neighbourhood. Also, the werkwinkel is located in a community medical centre, so people come in there anyway. And the people from community care are involved and they get behind the front doors. In short, they communicate in an accessible way, they are physically present in the neighbourhood and close to the target group.

### **4.3 Sub-conclusion**

The structure of career guidance seems very fragmented in the Netherlands: there are many different career guidance initiatives for vulnerable target groups. In this chapter, we have highlighted the policy and communication choices of two practical examples: learning ambassadors and the werkwinkel.

The first practical example concerns learning ambassadors. These are employees who encourage their colleagues to work on their personal development. This is about those colleagues with a fear of learning, experience barriers to learning and/or uncertainty about their own abilities. For this concept to succeed, however, there are a number of preconditions. The second practical example is the werkwinkel: this is a living room-like setting in the neighbourhood where people with a distance to the labour market who want to work can enter into low-threshold discussions with experts from various organisations.

# 5



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Conclusion

The previous exploration study (Euroguidance, 2022) provided insight into what is important in reaching vulnerable target groups and how other European countries do this. This exploration study builds on this and focuses on the Dutch context. The purpose of this exploration study is therefore twofold: (1) to *gain more insight into the policy and communication choices made in the Netherlands around career guidance for vulnerable target groups focused on the labour market*, and (2) to *make practical recommendations to better reach vulnerable target groups and other countries within the Euroguidance network about this*. This includes the following main question: *in what way can we reach vulnerable target groups in the Netherlands to encourage them to make more use of career guidance?* To answer this question, we used desk research and interviews with six experts from four organisations.

### 5.1.1 Career guidance for vulnerable target groups at policy level

First, we looked at the structure of career guidance for vulnerable target groups in the Netherlands at policy level. We find that a unified structure is currently lacking. The large number of stakeholders results in a fragmented structure, which can make it difficult for people to see the wood for the trees. This applies in particular to private initiatives. In policy documents, we can distinguish a number of target groups that are seen as vulnerable: people with a language barrier in one way or another, older people (over 56), people with an occupational disability and the practically educated (especially up to EQF level 2, but also levels 3 and 4 are mentioned in policy). However, the term 'vulnerable target groups' is not used per se. Policy documents generally refer to people

with a distance to the labour market. However, the characteristics of these persons do not become entirely clear.

The interviews also do not reveal an unambiguous definition of what constitutes a vulnerable target group. It is interesting that some target groups are named as vulnerable in both policy and practice. These are people who are unemployed, have an employment restriction and people with a language deficiency. Yet in practice, more specificity is given to which people can be designated as vulnerable, such as informal carers, people with physically demanding work, flex workers, people with low self-esteem or fear of failure and self-employed people.

If we look at communication choices in policies, we should note that there are almost no explicit communication choices reflected in policy documents that focus on the target group for which it is intended. This could be a reason why the target group for which it is intended cannot find the offer.

### **5.1.2 Career guidance for vulnerable target groups in practice**

We also looked at what policy and communication choices career experts make in practice to reach vulnerable target groups at four learning and employment organisations. Career guidance is part of their services at all four organisations. Looking at the distinction in target groups in policy, organisations have a very broad focus, and do not focus on one target group specifically.

Several success factors and challenges seem important in motivating and guiding vulnerable target groups, according to the experts. Success factors include paying more attention to the preliminary process, small interventions, having a point of contact, certification and being allowed to work on personal development by the organisations in terms of time and resources. Regarding communication, it seems important to adapt communication of interventions to the target group. Looking at challenges, a few issues emerge in the interviews: subsidy schemes do not always seem to be set up for vulnerable target groups. Moreover, a clear structure for learning and working is still missing at the moment, although the policy letter on the new employment infrastructure (Ministry of General Affairs, 2022) could help with this.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this exploration study, Euroguidance the Netherlands makes the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1: Provide overview of initiatives and better information**

The LLL policy letter provides insight into the public supply, but not yet into the private sector. Make the private initiatives clear and provide a clear structure for individuals, so they know the offer better. Here, it is important that clearer information is available and communication also focuses on the target group for whom the offer is intended.

### **Recommendation 2: Linking training provision to work**

Ensure that training provision can be combined with work. This point is also mentioned in the parliamentary letter on policy lines for LLL. The learning ambassadors can be seen a good example to do so.

### **Recommendation 3: Physically and emotionally connect with the target group**

Make sure the offer connects to the target group both physically and emotionally by being visible in the place where the target group lives/works and by using good conversation skills and coaching skills to connect with the target group's living environment.

### **Recommendation 4: Context matters**

The previous exploration study revealed that context is important in identifying target groups: 'Ireland, Scotland and Germany all three target people with a migration background, while only Slovenia specifically targets Roma' (Elderensbosch et al., 2022, p. 43). This exploration study in the Netherlands confirms this conclusion, as specific vulnerable target groups are also identified in policy and practice in the Dutch context. This shows the importance of identifying which target groups are of interest in a given context.





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# HOW TO REACH VULNERABLE TARGET GROUPS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN THE NETHERLANDS?



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