First wider, then the agency

Employers who cannot find staff start with what costs little: more channels, their own network, training people up. Paid help comes later. One in five brings in a recruitment agency or headhunter more often.

Summary

Of Dutch employers with external vacancies, 65% made extra recruitment efforts in autumn 2025 because of labour market tightness. The order forms a ladder. At the top sit the cheap rungs: spreading vacancies across more channels (54%), recruiting through the employer's own network (52%), and hiring candidates who still need training (52%). Better terms of employment follow at 34%. Only then comes the outside door: 22% hired more temporary, seconded, or freelance staff, and 21% deployed a recruiter, recruitment agency, or headhunter more often. In manufacturing, both external routes sit above average. At the peak of the shortage, in autumn 2021, half of employers with hard-to-fill vacancies engaged a temp agency, recruitment agency, or headhunter. An agency that wins a mandate therefore receives, on average, a vacancy the market has already rejected: 87% of employers with recruitment problems reported too few applications.

The ladder

At 63% of Dutch employers, at least one vacancy arose in the 12 months before autumn 2025 that was filled from outside the organisation. Of those employers, 65% made extra recruitment efforts because of the tight labour market. 35% did nothing extra.

The efforts follow a recognisable order. Employers start with what costs little and sits close to home, and only then move to measures that cost money or change the job itself.

Cheap first

The top rungs concern the recruitment method itself. 54% of employers with external vacancies spread vacancies across more or different channels, 52% recruited more through their own network, and 52% more often hired candidates who still need training. 44% offered candidates a no-strings introduction, and 41% approached potential candidates directly more often.

Only then do the measures touch the wallet or the job. 34% offered applicants better terms of employment, 32% tried to reach other target groups, 20% adjusted task packages, and 17% lowered or dropped job requirements. Recruiting abroad closes the list at 5%.

Then the outside door

Between those rungs sits the external route. 22% of employers with external vacancies hired more temporary, seconded, or freelance staff because of the shortage. 21% deployed a recruiter, recruitment agency, or headhunter more often.

The distribution across sectors is uneven. In manufacturing, employers choose both external routes more often than average, alongside targeting other groups and training people themselves. In construction and in transport and storage, the answer is mainly more flexible staff. And in wholesale, information and communication, and financial institutions, deploying a recruiter, agency, or headhunter ranks in the sector's top three most effective measures, a ranking it does not reach nationally.

What works, according to employers

UWV asked employers who made several efforts which one delivered most. Recruiting through the own network tops the list at 29%, followed by spreading vacancies wider (23%) and hiring candidates who still need training (14%). Deploying a recruiter, agency, or headhunter is named by 8%, hiring more flexible staff by 4%.

That 8% looks modest, but it should be read against usage: the measure was deployed by 21%. Set against each other, a sizeable share of its users names the external recruiter as their most effective step. The own network remains the strongest rung on that measure too: 52% used it, 29% call it the best.

The complication

The external route moves with the shortage, but the measurements are not directly comparable. In autumn 2021, at the peak, 50% of employers with hard-to-fill vacancies engaged a temp agency, recruitment agency, or headhunter (survey of 3,061 employers). In autumn 2025, 21% of employers with external vacancies deployed those means more often because of the shortage. Population and question differ: the first measurement counts any use for a difficult vacancy, the second only extra use. Side by side, both figures still point the same way: paid help is the rung for advanced need, not the first reflex.

The ladder also hides an assumption. The cheap rungs improve a vacancy's distribution, not the supply of candidates. 87% of employers with recruitment problems name too few applications as the cause. Spreading wider does not help when the candidate does not exist.

What this means in practice

- For agencies: the mandate arrives, on average, after the cheap rungs have been tried. The vacancy that reaches an agency is harder than the average vacancy in the market.
- For employers: the order is rational for common profiles but expensive for scarce ones. Every rung that yields nothing extends the time the vacancy stands open.
- The most effective channel, according to employers, is the own network. An agency sells the same mechanism at its core, with a network larger than any single establishment's.
- In manufacturing, wholesale, ICT, and financial institutions, the external recruiter is used more than average or rated more effective than average. That is the natural territory of agencies.

Method and sources

The figures on extra efforts and their effectiveness come from the UWV employer survey of autumn 2025 (Krapte op de arbeidsmarkt: wat werkgevers doen om personeel te werven, February 2026). Fieldwork by Desan, 15 September through 12 December 2025, net response 3,551 establishments, representative by sector and size class. The effort percentages apply to employers with external vacancies in the past 12 months; the effectiveness percentages to the 2,161 employers who made several efforts. Agriculture and employment agencies fall outside the survey, which means temp and recruitment agencies themselves were not polled.

The 2021 figure comes from an earlier UWV survey (autumn 2021, 3,061 employers) with a different question and population; it is used here as a level indication, not a time series. The cause percentages (too few applications) come from the companion publication Daling moeilijk vervulbare vacatures (February

2026). All UWV publications cited may be reused with attribution. What the figures do not show: no official statistic measures the cost or the lead time of each rung.

Recruitment, Shortage, Agencies, Industry, IT, All markets

Sources

- UWV, Krapte op de arbeidsmarkt: wat werkgevers doen om personeel te werven (februari 2026), Overname toegestaan met bronvermelding
- UWV, Daling moeilijk vervulbare vacatures (februari 2026), Overname toegestaan met bronvermelding
- UWV, Zo gaan werkgevers om met moeilijk vervulbare vacatures (najaar 2021), Overname toegestaan met bronvermelding