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Temporary agency work in the Netherlands

Abstract — This paper is the result of a study on temp agency workers and on the role that temp agency work played in company's staffing strategies and on industry and national regulations regarding temp agencies and temp agency work. It was conducted in 2004-2006, as part of a larger project on low wage work in the Netherlands, which was part of a five country study for the Russell Sage Foundation, USA. In order to provide a background for understanding temporary agency work, recent developments in and the various forms of external numerical flexibility in the Netherlands are sketched first. The temporary agency market apparently is well equipped to provide services for firms' demands for flexible labor. The largest volume of temp work through agencies includes rather low-skilled jobs for manufacturing, transport, cleaning and administrative work, although most large temp work agencies also maintain specialized departments for outsourcing nurses, secretaries, managers, and other professional medical or technical staff. If one relates the 2004 figures to the Dutch dependent workforce at large, temp agency workers made up 6.0 percent (head-count) of that workforce, and 4.5 percent in FTEs. In firms using temp agency workers, on average 7 percent of the workforce recently was made up of temp agency workers. Major motives for companies to hire temp agency workers are peaks in production, mostly predictable peaks, as well as replacement of staff falling ill. As for the regulatory regime, in the late 1990s, two species of legislation were introduced that are of relevance here. The Flexibility and Security ('Flexicurity') Act of 1999, replacing the 1965 law, is most important for the regulation of employment relationships in and by temp work agencies. The 1998 WAADI Act regulates the temp agency product market, and abolished the former license system, although the government kept the option open to reinstate such a system 'in the interest of good relations on the labour market or the interests of the personell concerned'. For temp work agencies the main implication of the new law was that agreements between them and employees were to be employment contracts. As temp work agencies are assumed to bear employer responsibility, this may lead to larger security for temp agency workers. Temp agency workers are for the larger part covered by a collective agreement, concluded by General Federation Temporary Work Agencies – ABU with the major trade unions. After mandatory extension, about 94 percent of the temp agency workers were covered by an agreement. For typologies of temp agency workers on employment status and education we have analysed the 2004 data of the WageIndicator, collected via a web-based survey addressing the labor force in the Netherlands. The analyses show that 1.7 percent of the observations concerned a temp agency worker. Of this group, one out of ten indicated to be a school pupil or student. Another five percent was a housewife/man with a job on the side, partly disabled, unemployed, or working without loss of unemployment benefits. Temp agency work is often associated with people with a weak position in the labour market, but it appeared that temp agency workers did not significantly differ from other workers with regard to their years of education, although they more often had enjoyed general education instead of vocational education. Temp agency workers are typically young workers, as they proved to be relatively younger than the workforce of any other large branch of industry. Compared with their share in the total Dutch workforce, migrant workers, from western or from non-western origin, are comparatively more often employed via temp work agencies.

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Author(s)

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Year of publication

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- 2007** Temp agency work and migration
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