



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

2023 focus on HR

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Annual Social Report

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Introduction: Review of 2023

2023 was another tumultuous year. A year in which, as in 2022, we showed our agility and flexibility in response to international crisis situations and conflicts. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is still having a profound effect on global power relations, peace and security, food security, migration movements, energy security and global trade. In 2023 we were also confronted with escalating violent conflict between Israel and Hamas. In the Netherlands parliamentary elections took place, which were followed by the start of the formation of the new government.

Diversity, inclusion and social and emotional safety remained high on the agenda both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) and in wider society. BZ also continued its follow-up to the exploratory study on [Racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), Racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and launched a study into barriers to and drivers of women's advancement at BZ. The final report is expected in the summer of 2024.

Finally, throughout 2023 the Central Government Audit Service (ADR) conducted an evaluation of BZ's human resources policy. The ADR's final report is expected in early 2024 and will probably result in changes to HR policy.

Below we will look in more detail at the seven main themes that were relevant to BZ in 2023.



Theme 1: Staff complement

In 2023, as in previous years, BZ's main priorities when it came to staffing were agility, an outward-looking attitude, a task and results-based work culture, and a focus on diversity, inclusion and social and emotional safety.

Figure 1. Numbers of men and women – 2019 to 2023

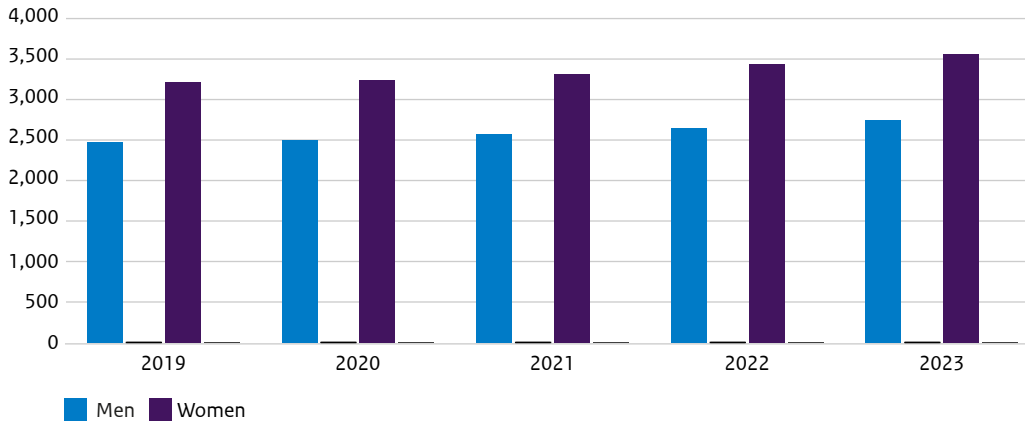
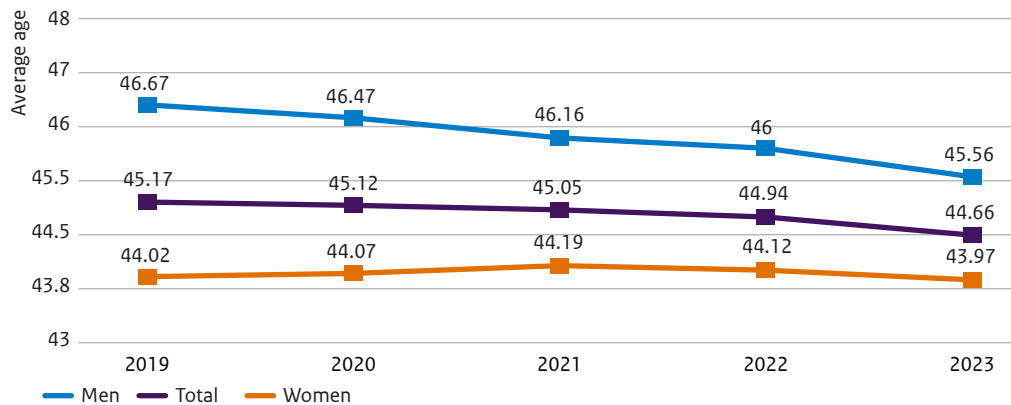


Figure 2. Average age – 2019 to 2023



Crisis management and the growing importance of security and information security

2023 was marked by a growing number of international crises which required ongoing tailored responses from BZ. This placed additional demands on BZ staff at a growing number of representations abroad. Extra efforts were also required to ease the workload of staff posted abroad by BZ and other ministries and of locally employed staff.

By setting up a flexible pool, BZ managed to keep the BZ Crisis Centre (DCC) and representations abroad staffed 24/7 when and where necessary.

Operational managers

Operational managers (OMs) are responsible for operational management at diplomatic missions abroad. Recruiting, selecting and training OMs has been a challenge for BZ for some time, especially at high-risk and very high-risk diplomatic missions abroad and even more so in countries where it is difficult to fill vacancies. The OM is part of the management team and is responsible for security (including information security), consular issues, accommodation and more. It is therefore crucial that the OM role is properly performed at all Dutch diplomatic missions worldwide.

Thanks, in part, to additional investments, it has been possible to ensure all high-risk and very high-risk representations abroad have a qualified operational manager posted from The Hague. OM vacancies at almost all other missions were also filled successfully in 2023. This enables all staff at Dutch diplomatic missions abroad to do their work properly and as safely as possible.

Table 1. Number of staff working at the ministry in The Hague

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Totaal
Seconded to BZ	87	73	74	73	73	380
BZ civil servants	2,180	2,274	2,351	2,484	2,643	11,931
Interns	100	52	20	40	41	253
Trainees	10	10	12	8	10	50
Agency workers	244	260	319	399	423	1,644
Total	2,620	2,669	2,775	3,005	3,190	14,258

Table 2. Number of staff working at representations abroad

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Totaal
Attachés	286	313	320	311	333	1,563
Seconded to BZ	46	46	39	35	30	195
BZ civil servants	719	728	719	726	753	3,646
Local employees	2,222	2,223	2,217	2,219	2,241	11,121
Intern	224	109	3	26	78	439
Trainees	34	27	33	46	56	195
Total	3,530	3,444	3,330	3,363	3,491	17,159

Local employees

Some 2,000 local employees work together with staff posted from BZ and other ministries at Dutch diplomatic missions worldwide to implement Dutch policy. Local employees are essential to achieving the Netherlands' targets abroad as optimally and effectively as possible as they have knowledge of the country, access to local networks and, of course, speak the local language.

2023 was a tumultuous year for local employees, too. The crises in many countries, and the HR-related impact (exemption from work, relocation, or even evacuation to the Netherlands) also affected local employees. This was discussed in detail in the [letter to parliament of 15 May 2023 regarding frameworks for the deployment of local workers](#) (in Dutch). The follow-up to the exploratory study on [Racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) was also discussed with all mission staff abroad and acted upon, and progress was made on the Modernisation of Employment Conditions for Local Employees (MECLE) project, with recommendations expected to be communicated in summer 2024. The Locally Employed Staff Council was actively involved in these processes.



Theme 2: New staff

Continuing to attract and retain new talent

In 2023 the total amount of external recruitment at BZ remained high. In general, BZ receives more responses to job vacancies than is average across central government. However, due to continuing pressure on the labour market some vacancies in ICT and finance were difficult to fill. BZ has appointed a talent sourcer for targeted recruitment within areas in which candidates are scarce. Talent sourcing is new for BZ, but in the last three months of 2023 resulted in three successful candidate matches for long-standing vacancies.

Stabilising recruitment and selection

The primary goal remains to have the right staff member in the right position at the right time, both now and in the future. This year the recruitment process was further optimised in terms of systems and practices. This resulted in more clarity about the selection process and a more expeditious procedure for the recruiting manager and candidate. BZ attaches great importance to promoting diversity and inclusion within the organisation.

This is why in 2023 the organisation got behind the central government-wide pilot scheme for broad recruitment and objective selection, designed to help give all candidates equal opportunities.

Like the job market, job market communication is constantly evolving. In 2023 BZ's strategy for employer branding was further developed in order to reach as broad a target group as possible. Campus recruitment and broad and inclusive recruitment in general has resulted in a large group of nearly 500 interns starting at BZ. BZ wants to be seen by the general public as an attractive, diverse and inclusive employer that offers scope for professional and personal development.

The ministry is deploying job market communication to encourage greater diversity among new policy staff. In 2023 more than 1,200 candidates applied for the international policy officer training programme (IBBZ), an 11.7% increase on the figure for 2022 (1,077).

Figure 3. New BZ staff in 2023

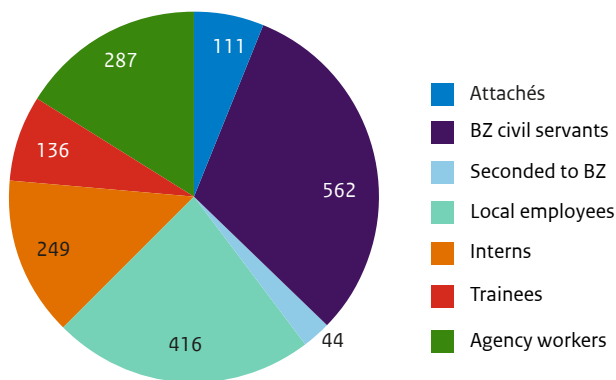
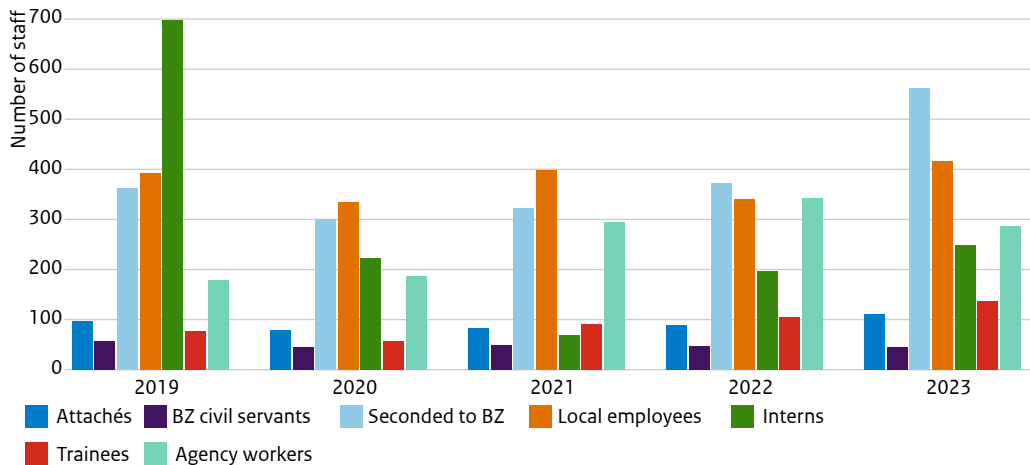


Figure 4. New staff in previous years



Onboarding

In 2022 BZ introduced a new onboarding programme for new staff. In 2023 this was developed further. BZ wants all new staff members to feel welcome. The new approach places emphasis on their role in their team and in the organisation as a whole. Each month an onboarding day is held at the ministry to give new staff a warm welcome and make sure they have all they need to get started. Surveys indicate that this is much appreciated. BZ started with onboarding at the ministry in The Hague in 2022, and is currently working on a form of onboarding for staff at the missions abroad to be introduced in the near future.

Enhancement funds

In 2022 additional funds were allocated to BZ under the coalition agreement of the fourth Rutte government. This resulted in a campaign to recruit more staff by creating more than 300 extra positions at diplomatic missions abroad and at the ministry in The Hague.



Theme 3: Advancement

Making full use of people's abilities

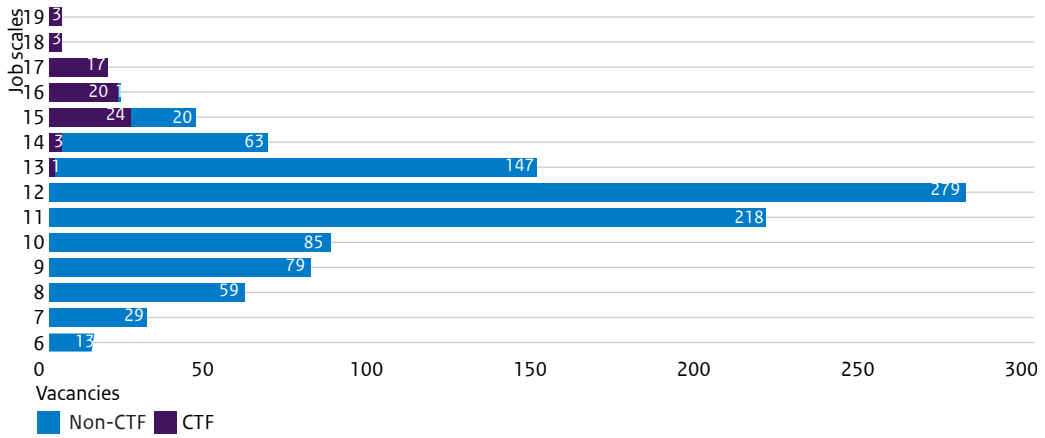
People are the most important factor in an organisation's success. All staff at BZ play an essential role: from IT experts, lawyers and HR professionals to diplomats posted from The Hague, management assistants, local employees and policy officers.

More advancement and creative solutions

BZ works with an annual transfer round to enable optimal staffing of jobs in The Hague and at diplomatic missions abroad. The choice made in 2022 to achieve optimal staffing within three main rounds, wherever possible, began bearing fruit in 2023. One effect was a reduction in the number of long-term unfilled vacancies. Transferable BZ staff were also contacted even more pro-actively than before with transfer suggestions, so as to achieve the best matches for vacancies that may otherwise have proved difficult to fill. This not only resulted in more jobs being filled, but enabled staff who had not initially found a new position to find a suitable match.

In 2023 the first job-sharing placements were also introduced at two embassies, allowing two BZ employees to share one job.

Figure 5. Number of internal vacancies by job scale



CTF = Advisory Committee on High-Level Placements

Figure 6. Number of internal applicants for internal vacancies by job scale

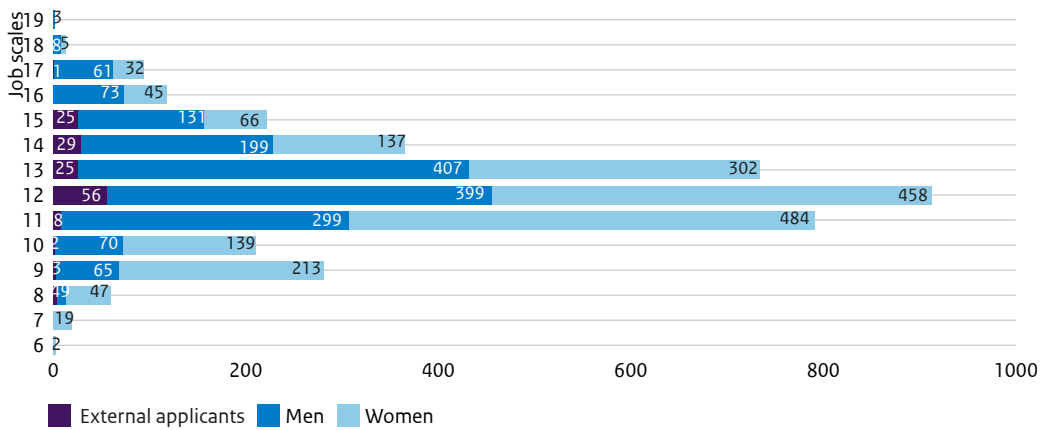
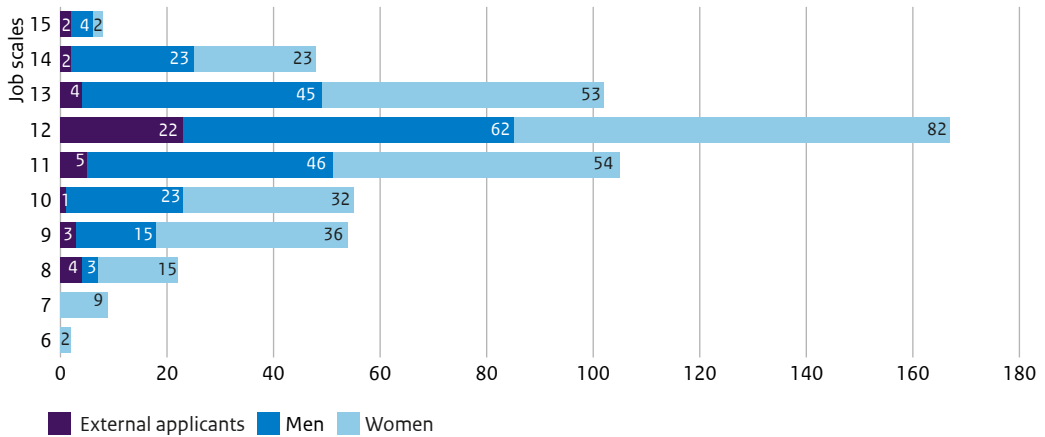


Figure 7. Number of staff placed by job scale





Theme 4: Departing staff

The power of mobility

In 2023 departing staff were an important focal point. BZ believes it is important to have a positive offboarding process for departing staff members. In order to gain useful insight into the reasons people leave, the organisation asks them for feedback. And lastly, it is important that staff who leave continue to feel connected with BZ.

Table 3. Total number of departing staff with an open-ended contract

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	5.0%	5.9%	5.1%	5.6%	6.2%

Table 4. Departing staff by reason for departure

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Retirement	1.7%	2.6%	2.0%	1.8%	1.8%
Other	3.3%	3.2%	3.1%	3.9%	4.4%

Interministerial mobility

BZ attaches great importance to interministerial collaboration on international matters. The challenges we face change over time, so international policy has to evolve as well. To this end it is vital to continually invest in interministerial exchange to gain and share knowledge and experiences. The [Academy for International Relations](#) also organises a range of internationally oriented training courses and workshops which are open to staff from other ministries.

In 2023 BZ enabled almost 100 incoming interministerial secondments and seconded roughly the same number of BZ staff, mostly to other ministries in The Hague.



Theme 5: Diversity and inclusion

Central government is committed both to diversity in the workforce and to an inclusive working environment, and so is BZ. A range of different outlooks, backgrounds, experiences and knowledge is key to working effectively to ensure a safe, stable and prosperous world. BZ has identified the following organisational objectives:

1. Achieving gender parity through a 50% target for women in management roles by 2025.
2. Creating 98 FTEs for people with a work-limiting or other disability by the end of 2023 within the framework of the [Jobs Agreement](#) (in Dutch).
3. Increasing the representation of bicultural staff to 8% in scales 11 to 14.
4. Increasing the representation of bicultural staff to 4% in scales 15 and higher.
5. Improving placement opportunities for older staff.
6. Ensuring that LGBTIQ+ staff feel safe in the workplace and have equal opportunities for advancement.
7. Improving the level of inclusion experienced by all staff.

In 2023 BZ achieved relatively good results on diversity. This can in part be inferred from progress on quantitative objectives. BZ draws data for this from a range of existing benchmarks and monitors. The most important of these is the [Central Government Operational Management Annual Report \(JBR\)](#) (in Dutch) published by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. It is important to note that this report only covers civil servants, and therefore does not include local employees at [diplomatic missions abroad](#) (in Dutch).

Women in management roles

BZ is committed to gender parity, with a 50% target for women across all management roles by 2025. This is in line with a 2022 government decision to aim for gender parity in all jobs at scale 15 and higher within the entire public and semi-public sector.

Table 5. Managers* by gender and scale

Gender	Scale	9	10	11	12	13
Men	%	41%	46%	53%	58%	55%
	Number	9	32	16	32	57
Women	%	59%	54%	47%	42%	45%
	Number	13	37	14	23	47

Gender	Scale	14	15	16	17	18	19
Men	%	52%	52%	58%	74%	64%	67%
	Number	79	65	34	35	9	6
Women	%	48%	48%	42%	26%	36%	33%
	Number	73	59	25	12	5	3

Source: BZ data, fourth quarter of 2023

*Managers according to the definition used in the Civil Service Job Description and Evaluation System

Jobs Agreement

BZ wants to help people with a work-limiting or other disability to participate fully in society. This is in line with the [Jobs Agreement](#) (in Dutch) made within central government. In 2023, the total workforce of people with a work-limiting or other disability was 75 FTEs.

BZ's approach is to fill jobs via general vacancies for roles that can be adapted to accommodate candidates' individual talents. In 2023 five generic vacancies were published. Many applications were received and nine extra jobs (averaging 36 hours a week) were ultimately filled.

In March 2023 BZ Unlimited, a network for staff who have a work-limited or other disability and/or are neurodivergent, was launched. The network helps raise awareness within the organisation. BZ has also joined an interministerial network organisation aimed at improving the monitoring of Social Return on Investment (SROI), a way of creating more jobs for people with poor employment prospects.

Migration background

In 2023 the central government-wide target figures for staff with a migration background¹ were 8% in scales 11 to 14 and 4% in scales 15 and higher. BZ achieved both of these targets, reaching 9% (just above average for central government) in scales 11 to 14.

¹ BZ uses both 'with a migration background' and 'bicultural' for staff who themselves or whose parent or parents were born in a non-Western country. This is in line with the definition used by Statistics Netherlands until 2022: [Person with a non-western migration background | Statistics Netherlands](#).

Table 6. Percentage of government employees by origin and organisation, 2022 and 2023*

Organisation	2022		2023	
	European	Non-European	European	Non-European
General Affairs	6.8%	18.1%	6.1%	16.7%
Foreign Affairs	8.2%	22.6%	8.3%	23.5%
Interior and Kingdom Relations	5.1%	22.0%	5.2%	22.7%
Economic Affairs and Climate Policy	5.8%	16.8%	6.0%	17.6%
Finance	4.2%	18.9%	4.5%	20.2%
Infrastructure and Water Management	5.1%	13.8%	5.3%	14.9%
Justice and Security	4.9%	19.4%	5.0%	20.1%
Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality	7.3%	10.2%	7.1%	10.5%
Education, Culture and Science	4.6%	14.9%	4.8%	16.0%
Social Affairs and Employment	5.9%	36.7%	6.0%	37.0%
Health, Welfare and Sport	6.1%	18.3%	6.6%	19.0%
High Councils of State	5.4%	20.7%	5.1%	21.5%
Courts	4.7%	17.3%	5.0%	17.7%
Overall	5.0%	18.8%	5.2%	19.6%

* As the new Statistics Netherlands definition has been used since 2022, it is not possible to show results for previous years. The categories 'Dutch' and 'unknown' have not been included.

Source: Shared Services Centre for Organisation and Personnel (O&P Rijk), National Office for Identity Data (RvIG)

In 2022 Statistics Netherlands' definition of 'migration background' changed. The data in the above table is based on the new definition and shows the percentage of central government staff with a migration background at each ministry. 8.3% of BZ staff have a European migration background, and 23.5% have a non-European migration background.

Safety and equal opportunities for LGBTIQ+ staff at BZ

BZ remains committed to equal opportunities for LGBTIQ+ people. In 2023 Dutch central government was the first national government employer in the world to sign the [Declaration of Amsterdam](#) (in Dutch), a statement of intent pledging to provide a safe and comfortable workplace that offers equal opportunities for LGBTIQ+ staff. BZ also participates in the annual [Workplace Pride Global Benchmark](#). This gives the organisation useful insights which can be used to assess and improve the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ staff. In 2023 BZ scored 61.3%, making it one of the highest-scoring organisations in the public sector.

Networks

BZ has five diversity networks:

1. Network for bicultural BZ staff: BiND
2. Network for women and anyone who identifies as a woman: FEE
3. Network for staff who have a work-limiting or other disability and/or are neurodivergent: BZ Unlimited
4. Network for LGTBIQ+ staff: Out There
5. Network for young staff members (including those who are young at heart): VerYBZ

Inclusion

The results achieved in terms of diversity make it all the more important to keep focusing on inclusion. Inclusion means making sure that all BZ staff feel welcome and respected within the organisation, and are able to work (and want to work) to the best of their ability.

At the end of 2022 the exploratory study on [Racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) was presented. In 2023 the Steering Together Against Racism (START) steering committee, led by the Deputy Secretary-General, coordinated the follow-up to the recommendations of the racism study and the [Safe Reporting](#) study (in Dutch) released earlier the same year. In 2023 many necessary steps were taken on the way to a socially safe, diverse and inclusive organisation where there is no place for racism. The senior management team consistently promotes this standard, and tackling racism is explicitly on the agenda throughout the organisation. A toolbox has been developed to help teams talk about this sensitive topic. Attention is given to bias in recruitment and selection processes and how to eliminate it. A new process and structure has been established for reporting racism, meaning it is now clearer who staff should contact and how they can obtain advice.

The range of available learning activities has been expanded (see 'Learning and development').

In 2023 two studies were launched by way of a follow-up to the 2022 letter on the lack of women's advancement to senior positions. The first study looks at the measures taken by internationally operating companies doing business internationally and other countries' foreign ministries to encourage diversity in advancement. The second focuses on the obstacles and success factors that play a role in women's advancement to more senior and managements positions. The results of the studies are expected in 2024.



Theme 6: Learning and development

Prepared for the future

BZ is continually working to enhance the organisation's learning capacity. The Academy for International Relations supports all BZ staff and other central government civil servants in international roles in developing their personal and diplomatic skills and specialist knowledge. This will prepare them for the future, worldwide.

Spotlight on courses

In 2023, as in previous years, the Academy offered a varied and topical range of learning activities and organised in-person and online meetings for exchanging knowledge and strengthening networks.

- By expanding the number of e-learning courses, the Academy made it possible for more staff, including those at the missions, to learn wherever and whenever they wished to.
- In the interests of improving civil service professionalism, the emphasis was on leadership and management, intercultural sensitivity, language courses and preparing and training new ambassadors prior to their placement.
- With the introduction of a new course on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Academy now offers courses on all regions worldwide. Regional studies are greatly appreciated by staff as they make a clear connection between strategy and day-to-day work.

- In 2023 two international policy officer training programme (IBBZ) cohorts began.
- The policymaking and implementation course, which focuses on the most important aspects of the policy cycle, was updated and tailored to current developments relating to civil service professionalism and the European Union.
- The Academy has developed learning pathways for BZ staff in seven job groups. Learning pathways help staff follow suitable learning activities and steer their personal growth and development within their current job in a structured manner.

Diversity and inclusion

BZ strives to be an organisation in which everyone can show who they are and which makes optimal use of the power of difference. The Inclusion Plaza gives an overview of learning activities that focus on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), a safe and supportive working environment and integrity. It also has information on e-learning courses, central-government-wide information and tools. Most learning activities are available in Dutch and English.

Partly in response to the publication of the exploratory study on [Racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) in December 2022, in 2023 the Inclusion Plaza added more team training courses on inclusive recruitment and selection, extra sessions of existing training courses for individuals, webinars and lectures, and new forms of learning activity such as microlearning courses. Other learning activities were adapted to incorporate diversity and inclusion.

Focus on learning and development

In 2023 a great deal of time and effort went into designing and implementing a new Learning Management System (LMS) to help staff and managers quickly find relevant learning activities that meet their learning needs. The system also provides the information the organisation requires for a data-driven learning and development experience. By the end of 2023 the Academy was ready for the system to go live on 15 January 2024.

BZ has career and talent development advisers who, together with the Academy, can offer managers extra support and advice for specific career-related and support issues in the context of staff development.



Theme 7: Health and vitality

In 2023 BZ again pursued a proactive policy on health, safety and wellbeing. The focus was on three main areas: promoting health and vitality, taking preventive measures and recovery after illness.

The importance of a healthy working environment is greater than ever. The tight labour market and high work pressure place considerable demands on staff. In the interest of good employment practice, BZ therefore strives to create greater awareness of healthier living and working. In 2023 BZ actively encouraged staff to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

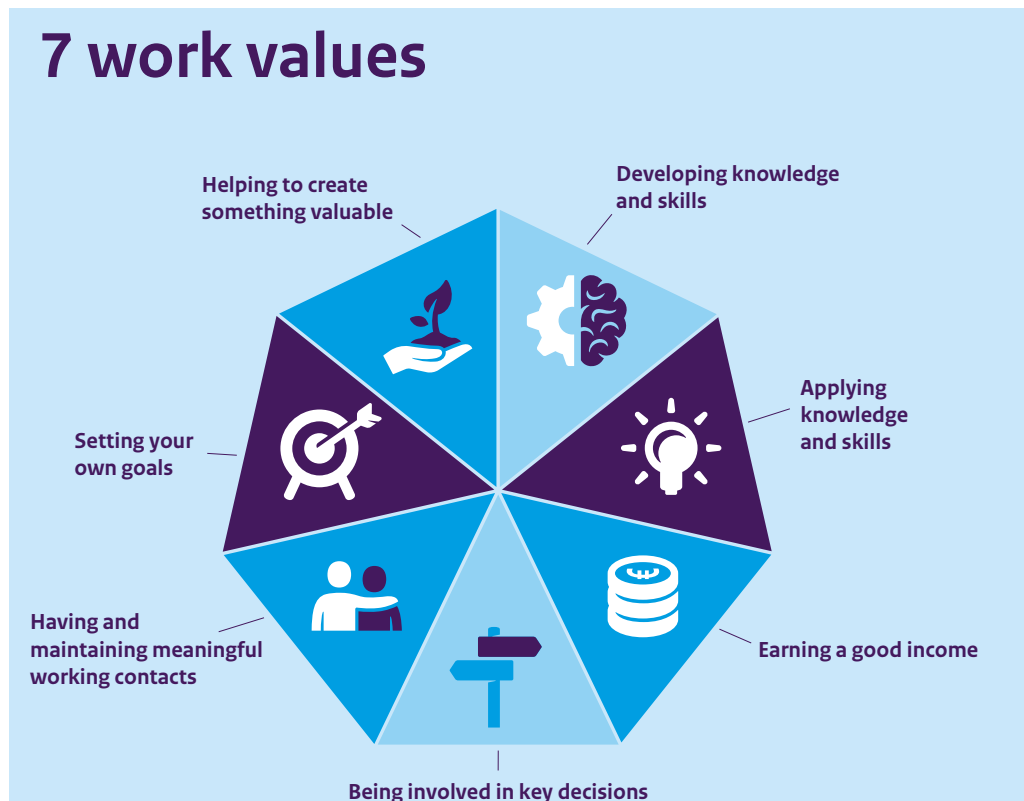
1. Promoting health and vitality

Work-related stress is one of the biggest risks when it comes to occupational health. Two instruments exist to help employers and employees fulfil their shared responsibility to create a healthy working environment and sustainable deployability:

- The Fitness and Vitality dashboard: a visual means of demonstrating what is important for well-balanced mental and physical health.



- The work-adds-value model: the guiding principle of this model is that work has added value for both the employee and the organisation.



Due to the increasing number of international crises, BZ is focusing on psychoeducation on emotionally demanding work. All staff who may be confronted with situations that could have a negative impact on their wellbeing are taught how to improve their own resilience.

Raising awareness of the importance of good health and vitality at work took further shape in 2023 through:

- inspirational sessions with themes including sustainable behavioural change, menopause and dealing with setbacks and limitations;
- the vitality newsletter, with information for staff on training courses on mental resilience, the position of the health and safety officer, the sporting achievements of ministry staff, and the many team activities organised at missions abroad to boost vitality;
- an internal website with information on health, safety and wellbeing, including burn-out prevention, dealing with grief, ergonomics, stress, PTSD etc. This site was visited approximately 800 times a month in 2023.

2. Preventive measures

- Once or twice a year sociomedical meetings are held with different departments and missions, during which the management team is advised by an in-house medical officer, staff welfare officer and HR adviser. In the case of diplomatic missions, local conditions are also considered.
- Both in the Netherlands and at the missions a risk assessment and evaluation (RIE&E) is drawn up in line with the Working Conditions Act and measures are taken to limit risks where possible.
- The in-house emergency service in The Hague and at missions abroad is always up-to-date and operational.
- In 2023 a training course in life-saving action was developed for staff at missions abroad where local medical facilities are of a lower quality than those in the Netherlands.
- Each year approximately one fifth of BZ staff at the ministry in The Hague and at missions abroad (both staff posted abroad and local employees) are offered a periodic individual medical examination. This examination is usually aimed at identifying possible consequences of work-related stress and/or screen work and is paired with a general vitality scan.

3. Recovery

In 2023 the absence rate for BZ was 4.3%, which is similar to the absence rate in the Netherlands as a whole. In terms of the frequency with which staff report sick, the rate for BZ, at 0.9, was lower than the national rate. This means it is back to the level it was prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

The difference between representations abroad and the ministry was unchanged. The main cause for this is that long-term absence at representations abroad is virtually non-existent. Staff at missions abroad who are on long-term sick leave usually return to the Netherlands.

Table 7. Absence rate

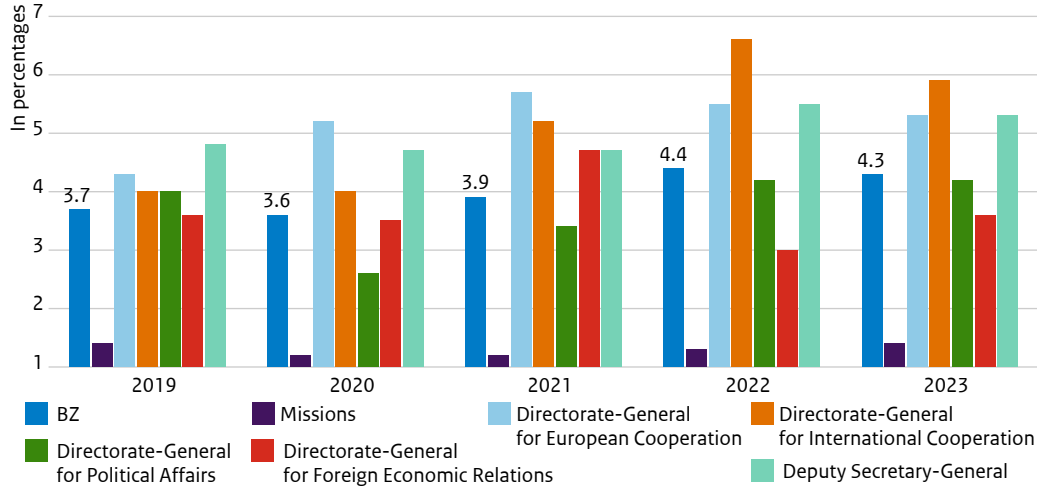
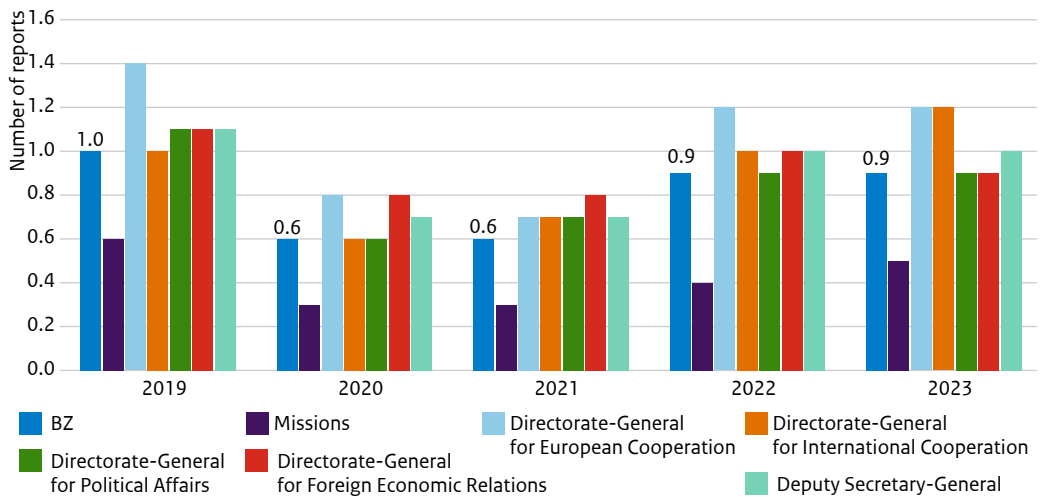


Table 8. Reporting frequency



In 2023 the percentage of people who did not call in sick at any point in the previous year rose to 64%. Interestingly, this is the same percentage as in 2020 and 2021, during the coronavirus crisis, whereas in 2022 the percentage fell to 54%. The cause of this is not known.

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Publication information

This is a publication of:
Human Resources Department (HDPO)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Rijnstraat 8
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The Netherlands

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October 2024