



Police availability for duty

The need to improve the way in which police availability and deployability are managed

2020





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Summary

The Netherlands Court of Audit sought to ascertain whether the national police management in the Netherlands have access to enough information so that they can properly distribute the police workforce over the various organisational units and set the right priorities in terms of the duties the police are expected to perform.

Conclusions

Basically, police deployment is all about ensuring that the right police officers are in the right places at the right time. In order to achieve this, police commissioners must have access to adequate information enabling them to take both operational and strategic decisions.

Our audit team found that the national police management in the Netherlands does not have access to adequate, consistent information on the number of staff who are both available and sufficiently qualified, in order to allow such decisions to be taken in the best possible way. In practice, the levels of staff availability and deployability are unevenly distributed over the regional units and 'local teams'. As a result, the police in certain areas are finding it hard to perform the many duties they are expected to perform.

Two key terms play a role in deciding how many officers are available at a given regional unit or local team for discharging specific police duties: *availability* and *deployability*. The police have defined the term 'availability' as the degree to which staff are physically available to work, i.e. they are not absent due to illness, on leave or away on a course. The term 'deployability' refers to the question of when and whether an available police officer is able to perform certain tasks, in the light of his or her expertise, skills, roster preferences, exemption from night shifts, etc.

The aim of the 2012 reorganisation was to enhance police performance by creating a unity of structure, management, policy and control. Our conclusions are not based on an assumption that this situation would follow within a short space of time. Indeed, our advice to the government and parliament at the time was that the police force should be allowed the time needed to implement the reorganisation. The efficient use of police resources is no simple matter, in part because of the terms and conditions under which police officers are employed and also given the fact that their deployment is subject to local control. Now that the police force has been subsumed into a single organisation, the national police





management should be able to pursue a policy of improving staff availability and deployability and reducing the differences between teams. There is, however, a need to improve the way in which police availability and deployability are managed. Indeed, the national police commissioner has the power to do so. In order to bring this about, figures on staff deployability must be included in the information available at the highest national level. However, this is not sufficiently the case at present, which means that the desired practical situation has not yet been achieved.

The main focus at national level at the moment lies on the number of police officers who are available in the various regions. According to the national police management, information on staff availability forms an adequate basis for pursuing an appropriate (strategic) HR policy. For the time being, this policy does not, however, take account of the practical *deployability* of staff for specific duties, at specific times and in specific locations.

Information on both availability **and** deployability is crucial to effective decision-making on police duties and for the setting of priorities in this context. The national police management views problems with staff deployability of staff too much as a matter for the regional units and local teams to resolve. The police do not sufficiently recognise that these problems should be factored into decision-making at a national level.

The terms 'availability' and 'deployability' should be *interpreted in exactly the same way* at all levels of the police force. This would prevent misunderstandings about staff deployment between different strata of the organisation.

Underlying findings

Staffing levels and availability for duty

Our analysis of national police availability data shows that, on average, the level of staff availability during the period between mid-July 2018 and mid-July 2019 was 71.4%. This means that a total of 17,501 FTEs were not available for duty because the staff in question were on leave, absent due to illness or away attending courses.

However, the national average for police availability does not shed light on the differences between the various levels within the police force. There are ten regional units, subdivided into 43 districts and 168 'local teams'. There is also a national force known as a 'central unit', a police service centre, the national police management and various support services catering for the national police management. If we look more closely at these different



levels, we see, for example, that an average of 29.7% of staff in Limburg were not available for duty during the period under review (i.e. 862 FTEs), compared with an average of 27.7% (946 FTEs) in the Zeeland and Western Brabant district during the same period. The figures in this report make clear that the level of staff availability among the local teams is far more varied than is suggested by the average figure per regional unit. Staff availability among the local teams ranges from 64.4% to a maximum of 77.8%.¹

To a certain extent, the variation in levels of staff availability stems from disparities in police staffing. Some regional units and local teams are overstaffed, whereas others are understaffed. It is difficult for the police to address these discrepancies, given that staff cannot be compelled to accept transfers to another unit.

Deployability

In order to take effective decisions on the duties performed by their teams and the deployment of individual staff, local team managers need to have access to information on staff deployability. In other words, they need to know how many staff are exempted from night shifts, whether certain members of staff have been allotted fixed days off every week, how many staff have temporarily been assigned to another local team or to other duties, and whether any staff have failed to pass a test allowing them, for example, to be deployed on duties that could involve the use of force.

The national databases used by the police force do not provide information on this type of deployability. Because local team managers need this information, they create their own spreadsheets on which they can keep these records. If this information were to be used to express the deployability of police officers in figures, it would become clear that the number of staff actually present among the regional units and local teams who are fully qualified to perform certain specified tasks, is not the same as the number indicated by the national data on police availability. If these statistics were indeed available, it would enable the police to take the appropriate action in response.

Central management

We found that the main focus of the national police management currently lies on restoring the balance between actual and nominal staffing levels. The key question here is whether the workforce is large enough. The situation at present is that certain senior ranks are overstaffed, whereas other (i.e. lower) ranks are understaffed. This is the result of the swingeing changes in staffing brought about by the police reorganisation in 2012, since when there has been an imbalance in staffing levels.





Only very limited action is taken at a national level to regulate the number of staff who are available for duty. For example, no internal arrangements have been made about the type of action that should be taken if not enough officers are available for duty. The only action taken is aimed at reducing sickness absence. No action is taken in relation to other factors that affect the number of officers available for duty, such as staff leave and training courses. Similarly, the national police management does not seek to address factors that affect the number of staff who are actually deployable, such as exemptions from night shifts or the approval of roster preferences.

Recommendations

The national police management could do more in terms of managing staff availability and deployability. Management needs to look at the problems affecting individual regional units and local teams and then to take steps at a national level to facilitate solutions. This would enable the police to make better use of its workforce and hence to improve its performance.

As the minister responsible both for creating the framework within which the police operate and for managing the police, we urge the Minister of Justice and Security to take the following action:

- Create a mechanism for generating consistent, practical information on the deployability of police officers. This could take the form of an informative dashboard showing the operational reality and supporting informed, short-term interventions and long-term adjustments. All levels of the police force should have access to the same, consistently structured information on the impact of staff deployability on service delivery. We realise that it is not always possible to fully quantify staff deployability. For this reason, we recommend that, where necessary, information on staff deployability should be supplemented systematically with qualitative assessments.
- Agree on clear and consistently applied definitions of 'availability' and 'deployability', so that figures on the number of staff who are both available and properly qualified for police duty are based on the same criteria, at all levels and in all regions. Make sure that the definition of 'availability' is accepted throughout the entire police force and that it is both workable and used in practice at all levels of the organisation.
- Formulate a minimum level of availability that should apply to a regional unit or local team, and take appropriate action if this minimum level is not met or if there is a risk of it not being met. Use this minimum level of availability as the basis for temporary or additional action, where needed.





- Make use of statistics on staff deployability and availability to ensure that more efficient use is made of staff resources. The distribution of ‘working hours modalities’ is a good example. A nine-hour modality is not consistent with a pattern of eight-hour shifts, for example, which means that insufficient use (or no use) is made of a number of hours during which staff are available for duty. Information on deployability and availability should play a more prominent role in the allocation of staff to regional units and local teams. It should also be reflected in HR policy, e.g. on recruitment, the intake of new staff and staff transfers.
- Staff availability and deployability should play a more prominent role in decisions on police duties and in setting priorities. Make sure that this type of information forms part of tripartite consultations with local mayors and public prosecutors, so that such meetings culminate in informed decisions, with all concerned being aware of any impact such decisions may have on the availability of police officers, either in other regions or at other times.
- Help national police commissioners, regional units and local teams to share more examples of good practice (for example, in reducing sickness absence or allocating fixed days off) with each other.
- Try and find solutions to the problems of recurrent costs and the impact on staff availability and deployability caused by the imbalance in staffing levels. For example, look into the possibility of devising a redundancy scheme for the staff concerned, perhaps in consultation with representatives of industries facing staff shortages. This would allow the police force to strike a better balance between nominal and actual staffing levels, and would also enable the police budget to be spent more efficiently at the same time. Clearly, the first requirement in this respect is for the police to obtain a clearer picture of the imbalance in staffing levels. This means knowing which members of staff are affected, the time horizon of natural wastage, the recurrent cost of the imbalance in staffing levels, and the options available under employment law and the conditions that would be involved.

The Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner reacted to our conclusions and recommendations. Their reactions are to be found in chapter 7 followed by our afterword.





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1 Introduction

1.1 Audit topic and ontext

It is absolutely vital that sufficient numbers of police officers who are qualified to perform their duties should be available, particularly with the police now coming under growing pressure to fight drugs-related crime, cyber crime and subversive forms of crime. This report addresses the question of whether the national police management has access to sufficiently accurate information to enable it to pursue a staffing policy that is closely aligned with police duties and the priorities in this connection.

A number of Dutch mayors wrote a letter to the members of the House of Representatives in October 2019, expressing their concerns about the lack of police capacity. In the letter, they described the extent to which the fight against crime in the Netherlands, particularly organised crime, is tying up police resources. This is what happens, for example, when a relatively large team of officers needs to be deployed to protect mayors, lawyers, judges and public prosecutors (Aboutaleb, 2019; Aboutaleb and Van Zanen, 2019).

Reports have also appeared in the media at regular intervals sounding alarm bells about the excessive number of duties the police are expected to perform, in the light of the available staff capacity. This is not a problem that is restricted to the big cities.² For example, a local newspaper published an opinion piece on 8 August 2018 written by the mayor of the small town of Moerdijk in which he called for the police presence at events such as football matches and cycle races to be reduced to a minimum, ‘... as the police have to set priorities in the light of their demanding duties and limited staff resources.’ On 30 October 2019, another local newspaper quoted the local police commissioner as saying that ‘We’re gradually being pushed up against the wall, and we now need to make choices.’ Similarly, a third local newspaper published an interview with the mayors of Goeree-Overflakkee and Schouwen-Duiveland on 9 July 2019. Both mayors had been calling for many years for a debate on the issue of police availability: ‘The way in which police resources are distributed does not take enough account of the actual situation on the ground.’

1.2 Police duties

The police have a wide range of duties to perform, ranging from responding to emergency calls to investigating money-laundering and human trafficking, from protecting politicians to policing football matches and demonstrations, and from solving thefts to performing roadside traffic checks. Police officers are the main asset available to the police force for





performing all these tasks. Not surprisingly, almost 80% of the annual police budget of € 5.78 billion (i.e. € 4.5 billion) is spent on staff and staff training (Police, 2019a); see Figure 1.³

Distribution of the police budget

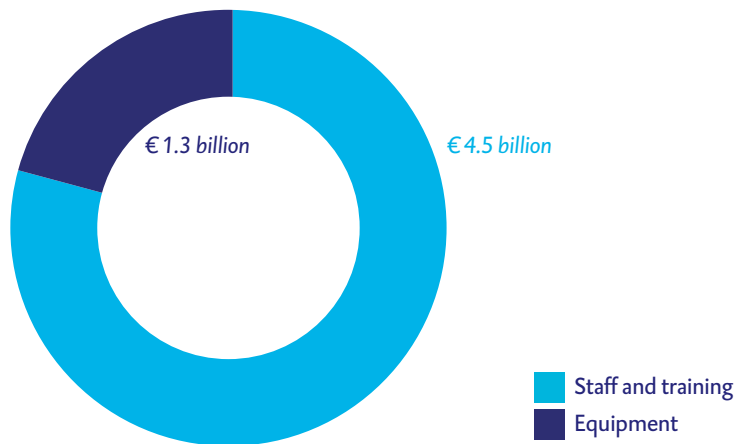


Figure 1 Police expenditure (Police, 2019a, p. 121)⁴

When the police are given new duties to perform (such as protecting lawyers or forming a special anti-drugs brigade to fight organised crime), they need to know how many officers they can deploy on which duties and exactly when the staff in question are actually available. The two key terms in this context are ‘availability’ and ‘deployability’.

1.3 Staff availability and deployability

The police define ‘availability’ as the degree to which staff are actually available for work, i.e. not sick, on leave or attending a training course. The term ‘deployability’ refers to the degree to which staff are capable of performing certain duties at certain times, in the light of their expertise, skills, roster preferences, exemption from night shifts, etc.

The police need to have adequate information on staff availability and deployability in order to know whether sufficient numbers of officers are available for performing a new duty to which priority has been given. If this is not the case, either a choice will have to be made as to which duties to perform or staff will have to be reassigned. The Minister of Justice and Security wrote as follows in the 2019 budget: ‘The demand for policing will always outstrip police capacity [...] It is up to the police to provide the authorities with better information in order to allow them to make these choices’ (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2018c).



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1.4 Audit scope and methods

Since 1 January 2013, the Netherlands has had a single national police force rather than 26 regional police forces, as used to be the case. The aim of reorganising the police was to create a unity of structure, management, policy and control, with the ultimate goal of improving police performance. The creation of a national police force was designed to achieve the following objectives (Police, 2012, p. 6):

‘To help make the country safer and to provide scope for raising the professionalism of the police force and its staff. The idea behind the creation of a national police force is to improve police performance, instil greater public confidence in the police and enable the police to operate as a single unit. What is required in order to achieve these objectives is not simply an adequate organisation in terms of structure, operating methods and systems, but also changes in culture, behaviour and leadership.’

The situation today is that the Minister of Justice and Security is responsible for the police, and the national police commissioner is in charge of day-to-day operations. The Minister described his responsibility as follows during the debate on the 2012 Police Act in the Upper House of the Dutch parliament in 2012 (Ministry of Security and Justice, 2012):

‘The Minister is in overall charge of the police. He carries full responsibility and has access to all the legal and material instruments he needs to discharge this responsibility. The Minister is fully accountable to the House.’

The national police force consists of ten regional units, which are in turn made up of 43 districts and 168 local teams. There is also a Central Unit, the national police management (consisting of senior police commissioners and various support services) and a police service centre. There is what is known as a ‘triumvirate of authority’ at each level, in which the relevant public authority, the public prosecution service and the police meet to discuss policing needs and police performance. At a local level, the triumvirate consists of the mayor, the commissioner of police and the public prosecutor. There is another type of triumvirate at the next level, i.e. regional unit level, involving a mayor representing the region in question, and again the public prosecutor. At a national level, the parties involved in these tripartite consultations are the national police commissioner, the Minister of Security and Justice and the public prosecution service.

For the purpose of this audit, we examined the way in which the police force is organised at national, regional and local levels. In other words, we looked at the national police management, the regional units, the districts and the local teams. The Central Unit, the police service centre and the departments operating as part of the regional units all fall beyond the scope of the qualitative part of this audit; see Figure 2.⁵





The organisational structure of the police force and the entities by us at various levels

Entities at which we performed in-depth audits

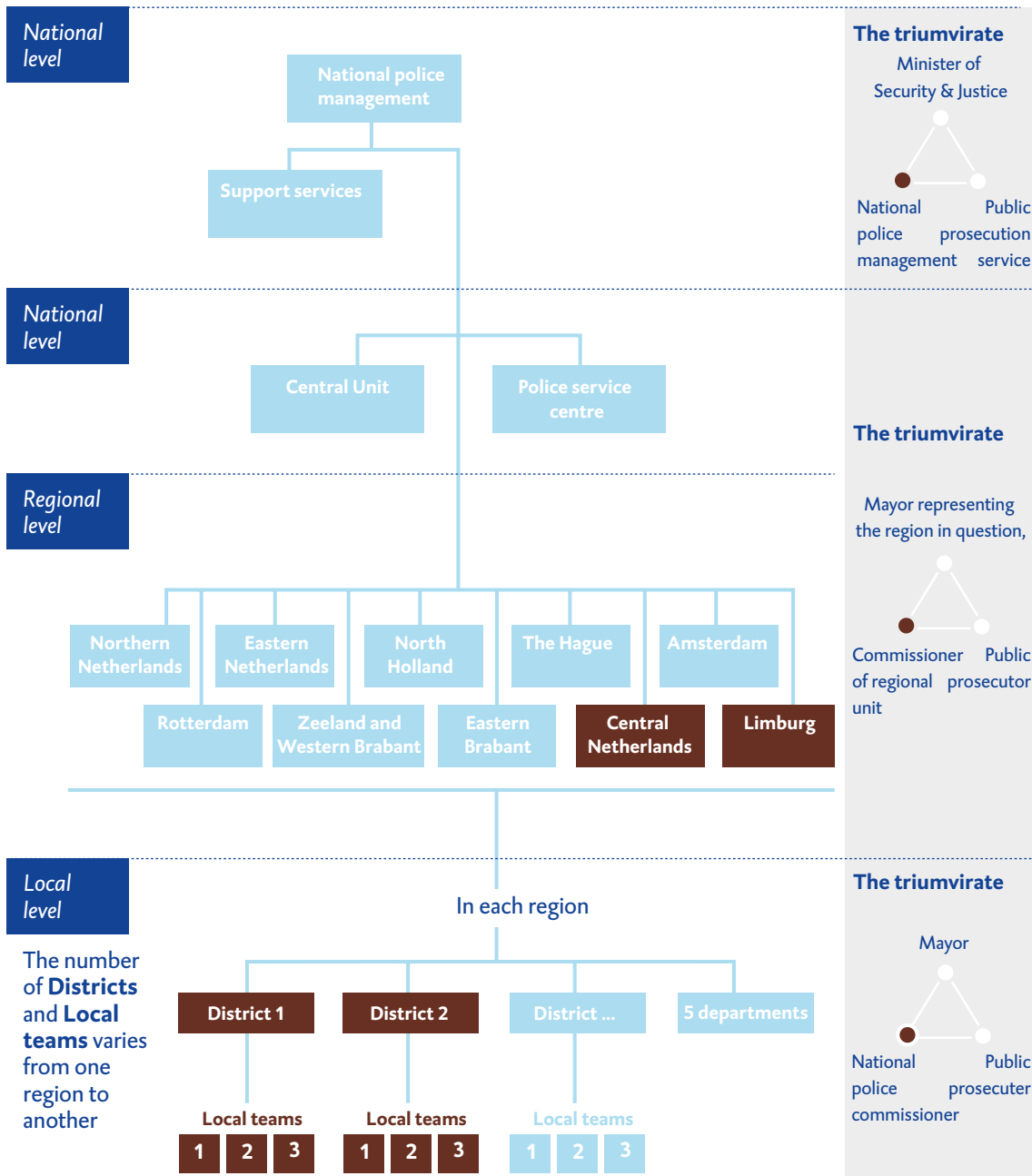


Figure 2 The organisational structure of the police force at local, regional and national levels⁶

We analysed a wide range of police data, i.e. figures on staffing levels, both nominal and actual, leave and sickness absence at all levels of the police force. We also asked two regional units and 12 local teams operating as part of the units in question, viz. Central





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Netherlands and Limburg, to provide us with the same data. We compared the latter data with the figures we had obtained from the national police management.

We also interviewed over 90 members of police staff, mainly from the two regional units and the 12 local teams, although we also spoke to people working for the national support services. We also spoke to a number of police officers working for six local teams at other regional units. These were teams with low, high and average levels of availability and low, high and average staffing levels. Some of these officers' experiences with staffing levels and issues relating to availability and deployability have been included as quotations in this report. We also analysed a number of documents containing information on staffing levels and availability. Although we discovered during the course of our audit that the statistics on police availability do not include data on deployability, we found the latter nonetheless to be a relevant concept that says something about the degree to which police staff are both present and qualified to perform their duties. More detailed information on our audit methods is given in Appendix 1 to this report.

1.5 Audit questions

Accurate information on the actual availability of properly qualified police personnel is absolutely vital if senior police commissioners are to take well-informed decisions on the deployment of police officers on specific duties. It is also important that the information is structured in the same way at all levels of the police force. Only if objective, accurate information is available on the degree to which police staff are both present and properly qualified for performing certain specified duties can the right priorities be set with the consent of all those concerned. Similarly, the effective allocation of staff resources also depends on the availability of objective, accurate information.

Against this background, we sought to ascertain whether the police have *sufficiently clear information* on the degree to which staff are available for work and also on the degree to which they are qualified to perform their duties. We also sought to establish whether the *same information* is available at the various levels within the police force.

The two terms discussed above, i.e. 'availability' and 'deployability', play a key role in answering these two audit questions. Both terms are also used by the police themselves. Information on both availability and deployability is of great importance in obtaining a clear picture of the degree to which staff are both present and properly qualified for performing certain specified duties.





Obviously, the level of police availability and deployability depends on the staff capacity allocated to the police at a national level and on the actual level of police staffing (see Police, 2012; Police, 2019b). Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between all four concepts.

Terms

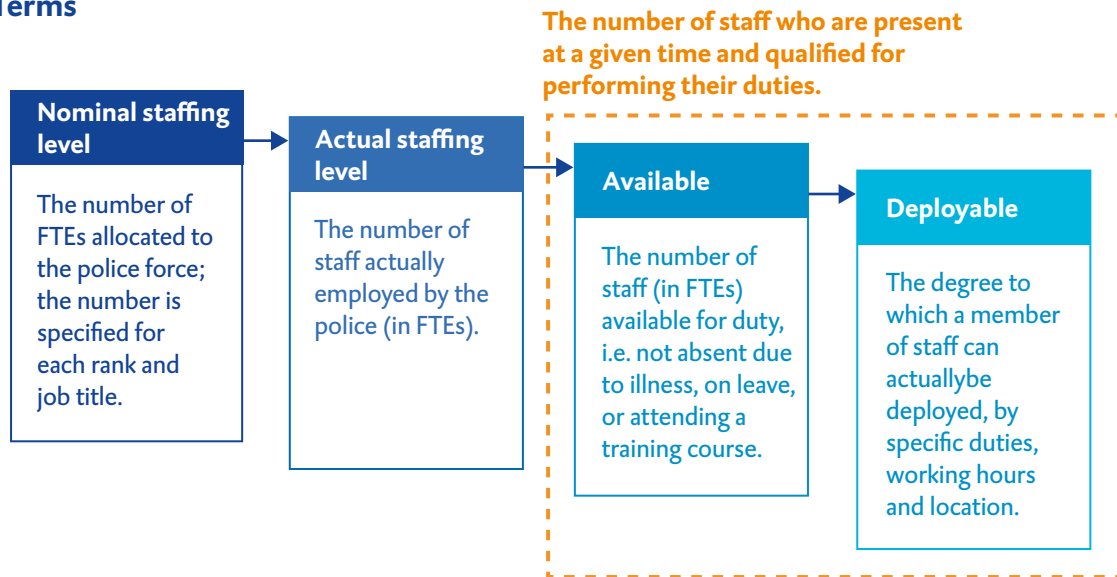


Figure 3 Relationship between nominal staffing level, actual staffing level, availability and deployability

1.6 Interpretation of terms

Both the Dutch parliament and the police force use a number of different terms to refer to the deployment of police personnel (see, for example, Lower House of Dutch parliament, 2018). We have decided to make consistent use of the four terms described above, i.e. ‘nominal staffing level’, ‘actual staffing level’, ‘available’ and ‘deployable’, and not to use other terms with more or less the same meaning. In referring to the duties performed by the police, the two terms we use are ‘police work’ and ‘police duties’.

Terminological confusion

Whereas the national police management tend to use the term ‘availability’, the regional units prefer the term ‘net operational capacity’. Similarly, the regional units often refer to ‘availability’ when they actually mean ‘deployability’.

Certain terms are also used interchangeably during debates between the Minister of Security and Justice and the House of Representatives. For example, the term ‘operational strength’ sometimes means the actual staffing level, but may also refer to the nominal staffing level. The word ‘capacity’ is also regularly used with different meanings.

The regional units tend to use the term ‘waterline’ to describe the minimum police capacity required for day-to-day operations. The national police management prefer the term ‘core staffing level’ in this connection. In discussing police duties, some commentators use the term





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‘capacity demand’, whereas others choose to talk about ‘supply of work’.

This terminological confusion has prompted us to avoid the use of certain terms in this report. It should be noted in this respect that the police are themselves attempting to bring some order to the disorder (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2019).

1.7 Previous audits of policy capacity

We have examined the issue of capacity management in the police force in the past, for example in our 2016 accountability audit (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2017b). The police have made a number of important improvements since then. For example, a ‘national set of capacity management terms’ has been adopted, and a senior member of the police force designated as being responsible for capacity management. In 2018, the police added a section on ‘availability’ to an internal dashboard, with the aim of generating information on staff availability. This dashboard (known as the Police Performance Dashboard) contains information on nominal and actual staffing levels, as well as staff availability, for each organisational unit within the police force. The Minister of Justice and Security has described the dashboard as ‘a major step forward’ in capacity management (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2019a). We used data from the dashboard for the purpose of our analysis.⁷

Our 2018 accountability audit went on to examine the additional resources allocated under the coalition agreement adopted by the third government led by Prime Minister Rutte, to increase both the number of community officers on the streets and the number of detectives. We found that the planned net increase of 300 FTEs in the number of community officers and 180 FTEs in the number of detectives, totalling 480 FTEs, had not been achieved in 2018. We also stressed the need to key a close eye on the persistently large numbers of staff leaving the force, coupled with the shortage on the labour market (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2019).

1.8 Format

This report begins by describing the type of information on staff availability to which the police have access (chapter 2). We go on to discuss the factors affecting the deployability of police personnel (chapter 3). In chapter 4, we analyse the range of duties performed by the police in relation to the availability of staff. The next step involves examining the way in which police commissioners seek to manage the availability and deployability of police officers, and suggesting potential means of improving this (chapter 5). The report concludes with our conclusions and recommendations (chapter 6) and the reactions of the Minister and the national police commissioner and our afterword (chapter 7).





2 Calculating the availability of police personnel

This chapter centres on the question of how the availability of police personnel is calculated. The calculation begins with the actual level of staffing. The number of staff (measured in FTEs) absent due to illness, leave or training is then deducted from this figure. This results in the number of available staff, see Figure 4.

Availability of police personnel

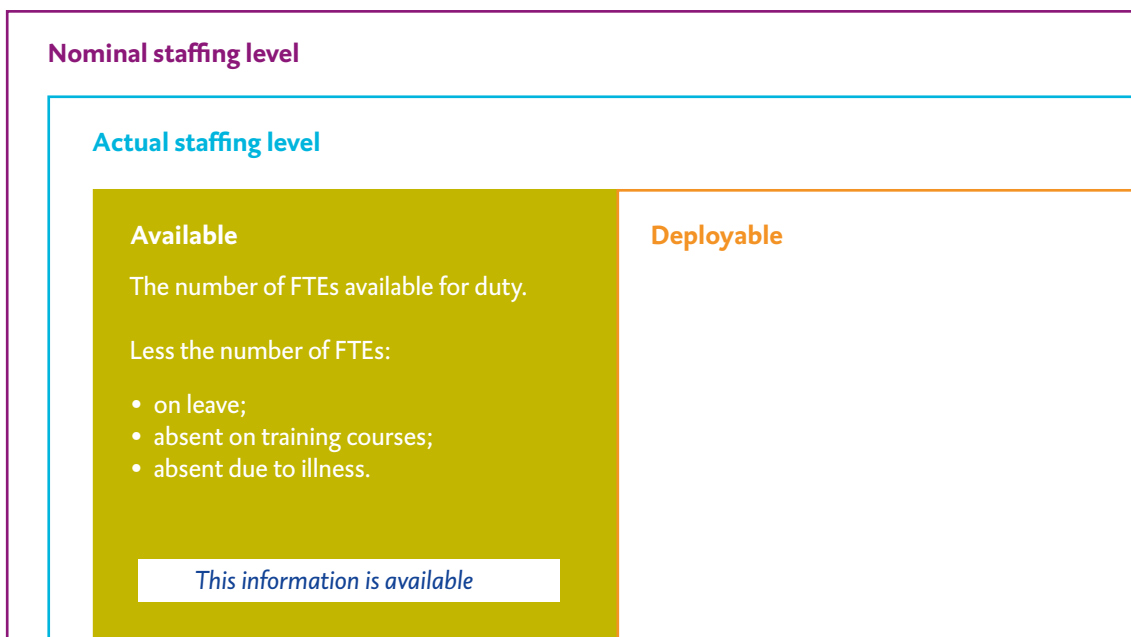


Figure 4 Staff availability compared with the actual staffing level

We found wide disparities between local teams in terms of actual staffing levels and staff availability. This means that, taken on their own, the averages for each regional unit do not provide sufficiently accurate information on the actual situation on the ground. This is a problem that we explore in greater detail in this chapter. We translate our findings into concrete terms at the end of the chapter, when we look more closely at the situation at one particular regional unit, i.e. the Limburg unit.

2.1 Police staffing levels

Ever since the police force was reorganised in 2012, the police have continued to employ more people than they are formally entitled to do under the national agreements on police staffing levels (Police 2014; 2015a; 2016; 2017; 2018a, 2019a). In other words, the police



Clearly, there are variations among the regional units in terms of actual staffing levels as compared with the nationally agreed levels. However, the differences among the local teams *within* the regional units are much greater, with staffing levels ranging from 19.2% lower than the nationally agreed level to 54.1% higher than the nationally agreed level.

2.1.1 The causes of imbalances in staffing levels

The current situation, characterised by overstaffing among a number of senior ranks and at the same time understaffing in other (i.e. lower) ranks, is the result of a series of big changes in staffing stemming from police reorganisations during the period since 2013. Staffing levels have been out of kilter since then.

It was decided at the time that the first step would be to ensure that all members of staff were assigned a role in the new organisation. Only then would the second step follow, i.e. remedying the imbalances in staffing levels (Police Act Review Committee, 2017, section 4.1).

The following example shows the distribution of nominal and actual staffing levels in a single job category, i.e. territory-based policing. The figures reveal considerable differences in the degree of overstaffing and understaffing from one pay grade to another; see Figure 6.

Territory-based police officers are understaffed in pay grades 5 and 6 and overstaffed in pay grades 7, 8 and 9

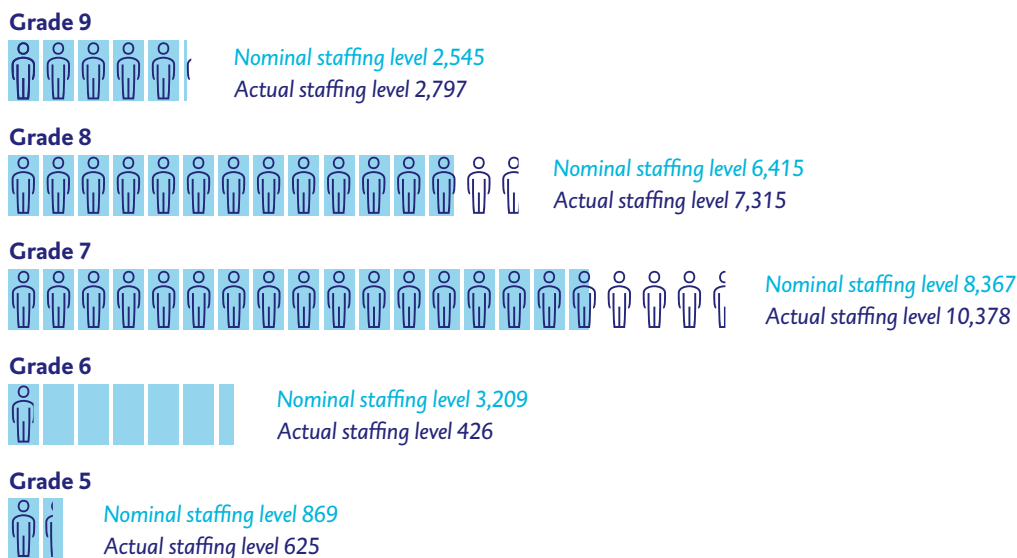


Figure 6 Nominal and actual staffing levels among territory-based police officers (on aggregate, from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019)





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When the second stage of the reorganisation was launched in July 2016, the national police force decided to allocate a maximum of five years to the process of rectifying the imbalances in staffing levels (Police, 2019a, p. 81). Restoring the balance between nominal and actual staffing levels is a complex process, partly because staff cannot be compelled to relocate; staff transfers are voluntary (Police, 2019a, p. 85).

2.1.2 The cost of imbalances in staffing levels

At the time of our audit, the national police management did not have any information on the cost of the current imbalances in staffing levels. The 2018 annual report does not cite any figures in this connection. We made our own calculation based on the data we received, and this suggested that, during the period from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019, the average level of overstaffing was 11,595 FTEs and the average level of understaffing was 10,659 FTEs. We calculated that these imbalances added at least €88 million per annum to police salary costs than would have been the case if there had been no such imbalances.

2.2 The effects of leave and sickness absence on staff availability

The police have access to various internal tables (which are incorporated in the Police Performance Dashboard) showing the availability of police personnel, among other things. The figure is calculated by deducting from the actual staffing level the number of staff absent on leave or due to illness.

We also used these figures for the purpose of this audit. Our own calculations show that, from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019, an average of 20.6% (i.e. 12,597 FTEs) of police personnel were not available for duty because they were off ill or on holiday. It makes sense that, at any given time, a certain proportion of staff are not available for duty on account of their being away on leave or ill. Staff are entitled to various types of leave, all of which are detailed in the collective agreement for the police. But here again, there are discrepancies among the regional units and particularly among the local teams within the regional units. As far as the regional units are concerned, the proportion of staff not available for duty on account of leave or illness ranges from 19.7% (in the case of Zeeland and Western Brabant) to 21.7% (in the case of Limburg). The difference is greater among the local teams, where the figures range from 14.2% to 27.6%, [see section 2.2.1](#).

2.2.1 The effects of sickness absence

Our analysis shows that the rate of sickness absence, i.e. the percentage of police personnel who were absent due to illness, stood at 6.3% between mid-July 2018 and mid-July 2019. The Limburg regional unit had the highest rate of sickness absence, at 7.5%. The rate was





lowest in the Zeeland and Western Brabant regional unit, at 4.8%. The biggest differences lie in long-term sickness absence; see Figure 7.

Sickness absence among the regional units ranges from 4.8% to 7.5%

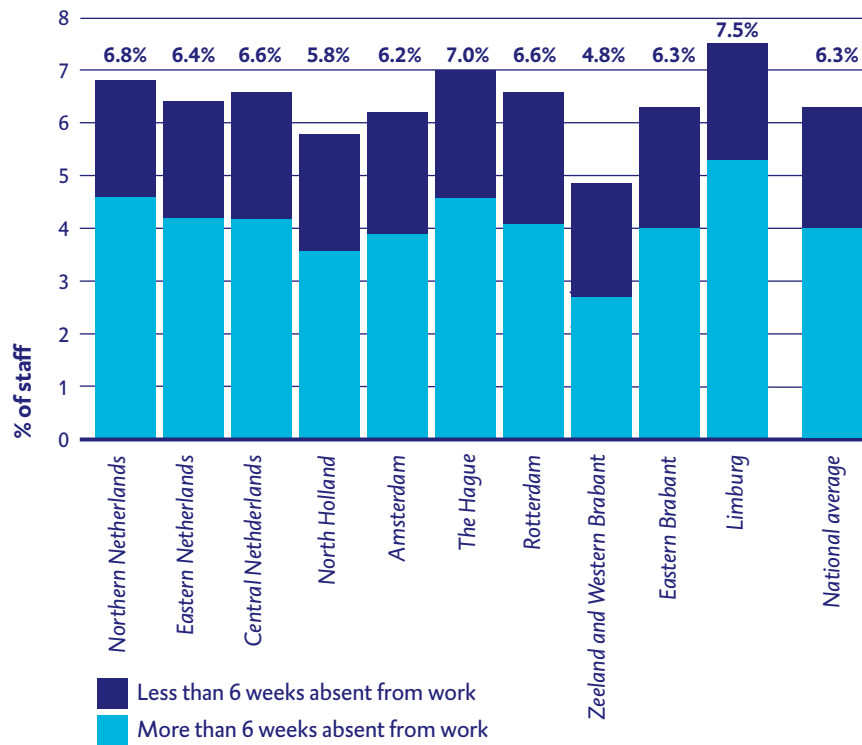


Figure 7 The effects of sickness absence, by regional unit

The differences are greater among the local teams than among the regional units: the rate of sickness absence at the local teams ranges from 1.6% to 14.4%. The breadth of this range suggests that there is scope for reducing the rate of sickness absence in certain local teams.

2.2.2 The effects of leave

The picture among the regional units in relation to leave is less varied than it is in relation to sickness absence. There are various forms of leave, including maternity leave, parental leave and ‘ordinary leave’ (i.e. holiday leave). There is also what is known as a scheme for ‘partial retirement leave’, under which staff aged over 55 are entitled to reduce their working hours. We found that, of these various types of leave, ordinary leave and partial retirement leave have a particularly marked effect on staff availability. The data we analysed shows that ordinary leave is evenly distributed over the year and that more or less the same percentage applies to all categories of staff, i.e. 9.1%. As it seems reasonable to assume that more staff take leave during holiday periods than at other times of the year, and also that not everyone





takes exactly the same amount of leave each year, this average figure most probably does not tally with the day-to-day reality.

Figure 8 shows the effects of leave on staff availability for duty. It shows that 15.2% of staff in the Eastern Brabant regional unit are not available because they are away on leave, whereas the comparative figure for The Hague and Rotterdam is 14.0%.

Leave among the regional units (including partial retirement leave) ranges from 14.0% to 15.2%

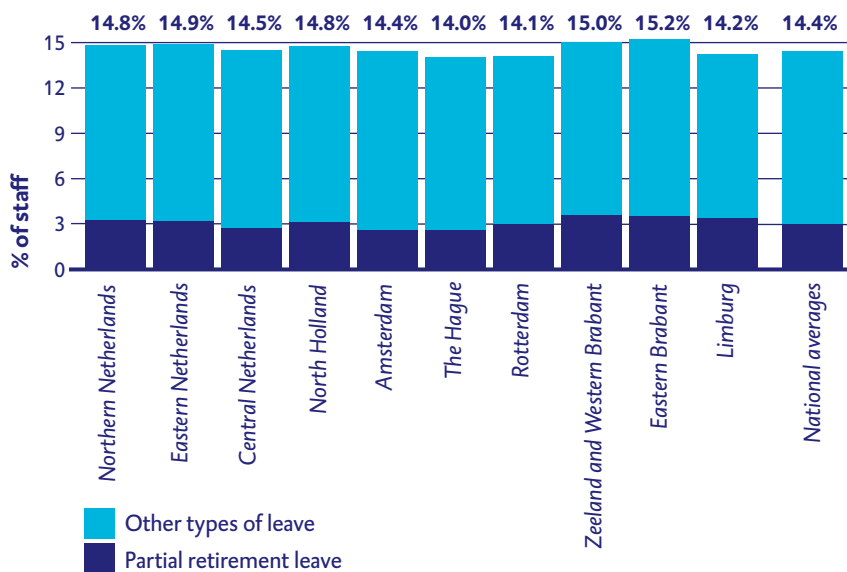


Figure 8 The effects of leave, by regional unit

If we now look specifically at the effects of partial retirement leave on aggregate staff availability in the police force during the period from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019, we find that the scheme leads to 3% of staff not being available for duty. The percentage at the regional units ranges from 2.6% (in the case of Amsterdam and The Hague) to 3.6% (in the case of Zeeland and Western Brabant). The comparative figures for the local teams are 0.5% and 5.8%.

Partial retirement leave to be replaced by scheme for extra leave

The scheme for partial retirement leave was replaced on 1 July 2019 by the ‘stage-of-life scheme’, under which police personnel employed under a full-time contract are awarded 53.8 hours of extra leave each calendar year. They can then choose either to take this extra leave during the course of their careers or to save it up and take it just before they retire. The stage-of-life scheme will have the effect of reducing staff availability by almost 3%. In other words, the new scheme





will have the same effect on staff availability as the old partial retirement leave scheme had in the past. There is one major difference, though, which is that only staff aged 55 and over were eligible for partial retirement leave, whereas the new stage-of-life scheme applies to all staff. So while the new scheme will not improve the level of staff availability, it will have the effect of distributing the reduced level of availability over all members of staff.

2.3 The effects of training on staff availability

Police personnel also spend time attending training courses. These include both compulsory training courses, such as the Integrated Professional Skills Course on the use of weapons and tests on knowledge of the law, and other courses that staff attends.

2.3.1 The direct effects: staff absence

The time spent on training has a direct impact on the availability of staff for duty. The precise scale of this impact is not known at present. Police training courses tend to vary a lot in duration.

‘Colleagues attending training courses and the Integrated Professional Skills Course are often repeatedly absent from work, mainly because such courses are often planned back-to-back. This can mean, for example, that staff are absent from work for a week.’

At the time of our audit, the internal methods used for calculating staff availability did not take account of the time spent on training. This is because the police are not currently able to work out how much time each individual member of staff spends on training. This means that time spent on training is not included in the Police Performance Dashboard for staff availability.

The figure for staff availability that the Minister of Justice and Security reported to the House of Representatives included a fixed percentage for the amount of time spent per employee on training, viz. 8% (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2019b).

We were told by the police that they do indeed assume that all staff (including trainee police officers) spend an average of 8% of their time on training. The idea is that dashboard users then deduct this percentage from the figure for staff availability quoted on the dashboard. The police said that they were planning to ensure that the dashboard includes the actual amount of time spent by each employee on training.

2.3.2 The indirect effect: tests failed

Training courses not only have a direct impact on staff availability, they can also have certain indirect effects. For example, the duties performed by a particular police officer may have to be adjusted if he or she fails certain tests relating to the use of weapons. This





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affects his or her deployability, as duties involving the use of weapons (such as patrols) then have to be replaced by duties not involving the use of weapons (such as desk duties). We do not have any details about the number of staff to which this applies. This topic is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

2.3.3 The effect of the percentage of trainee police officers

As we have already mentioned, the police assume that 8% of staff time is spent on training, during which they are not available for duty. This percentage applies to all personnel, including trainee police officers. In reality, however, there is a big discrepancy between trainee police officers and fully qualified police officers in terms of the amount of time during which they are available for duty, due to the fact that trainees spend most of their time in training.

In September 2019, the Minister of Justice and Security informed the Lower House of parliament that trainee police officers were available for duty during just 17% of their working hours (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2019b, p. 6). This was confirmed by the situation at both the regional units we audited: trainee police officers were available for duty during just 15% to 17% of their working hours.

The police are planning to include trainee police officers in the availability figures in the near future, working on the assumption that they are available during 17% of their working hours. Although this will lower the availability percentage currently used by the national police commissioner, it will be a more accurate reflection of the actual situation on the ground.

The presence of trainee police officers also has another effect on the availability of staff working for regional units. This is because a coach needs to be assigned to every five trainee police officers. During the first 16 weeks of a traineeship period, the coaching of trainee police officers is a full-time activity. Thereafter, coaching takes up less time. Officers acting as coaches for trainee police officers are either unavailable for other duties or have less time available for other duties.

On average, trainee police officers make up 13.5% of the staff of local teams. This means that trainee police officers and their coaches have a significant impact on the overall availability of the staff of the unit in question.





The number of trainee police officers in the regional units ranges from 5.9% to 8.8%

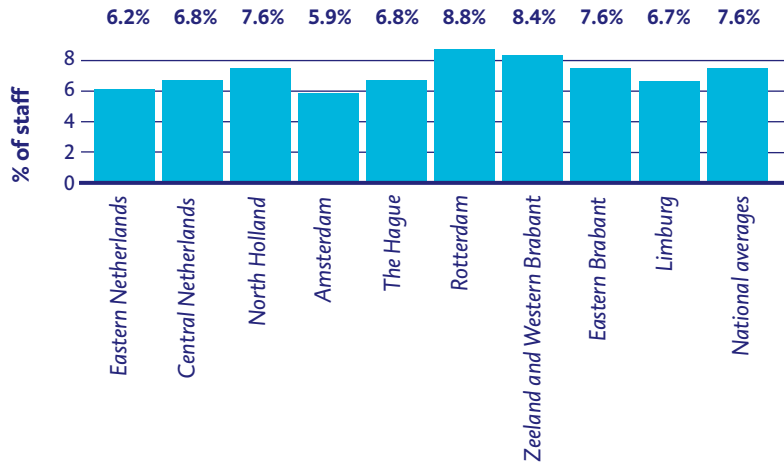


Figure 9 The percentage of trainee police officers per regional unit (a regional unit consists of more than just a number of local teams)

2.4 Differences in levels of staff availability among local teams

If we add the 8% of time during which staff are not available because they are away on training courses (even though, as we have already said, the actual figure is higher in reality) to the proportion of time during which staff are away on leave or absent due to illness, we find that, on aggregate, 28.6% (i.e. 17,501 FTEs) of staff are not available because they are on leave, ill or attending training. This is without taking account of trainee police officers. In other words, on this basis, the average level of staff availability during the period from July 2018 to July 2019 was 71.4%.

Figure 10 shows the percentage level of staff availability for each regional unit, including training. The figure makes clear that an average of 29.7% of staff in the Limburg region were not available during the period under review (the equivalent of 862 FTEs), compared with an average of 27.7% in the Zeeland and Western Brabant region (946 FTEs). The proportion of staff in these regions who were available for duty ranged therefore from 70.3% to 72.3%.





Distribution of availability levels at the local teams in the regional units

- = Local team with lowest average availability level
- = Local team with highest average availability level
- = Average availability level per local team
- = Average availability level per regional unit

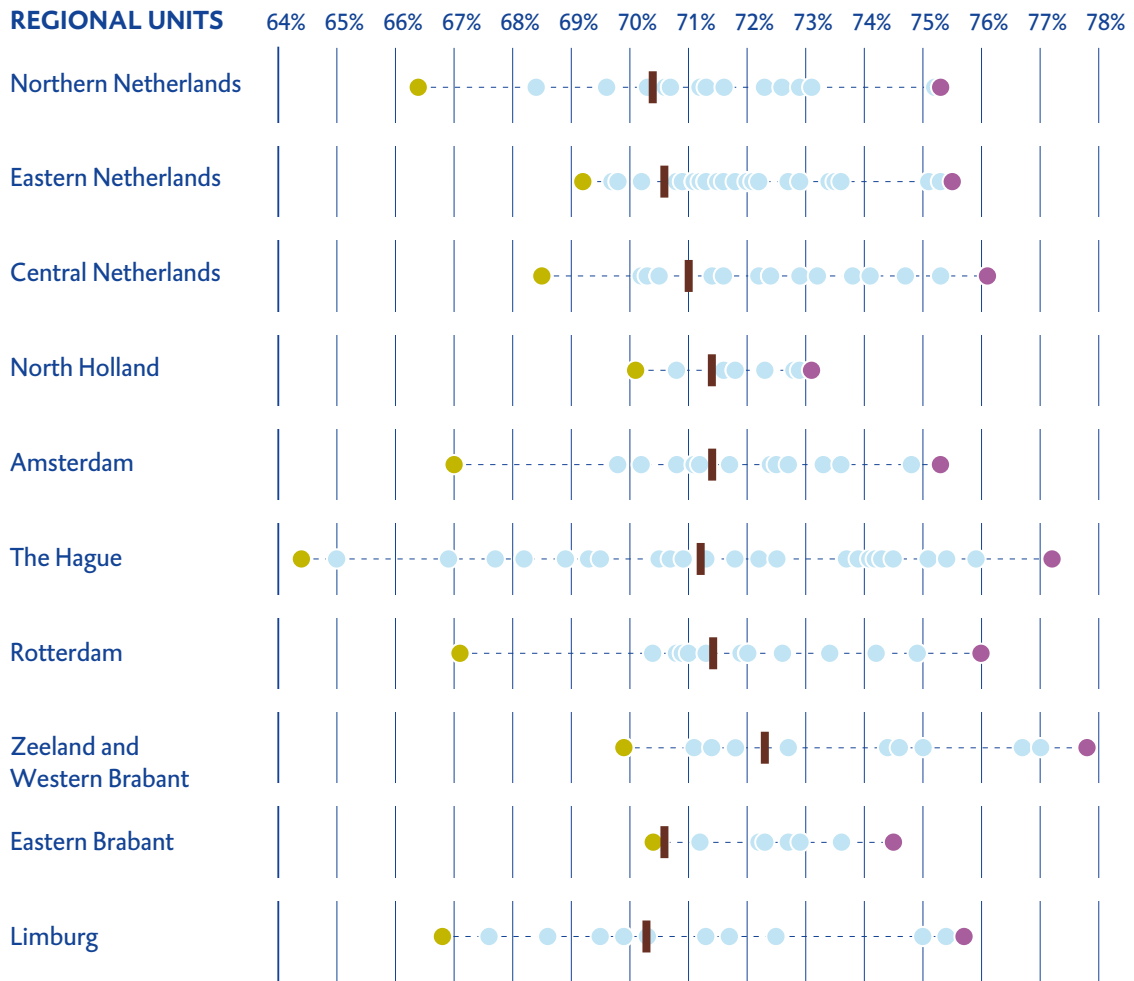


Figure 10 Level of staff availability per regional unit, and the variation in availability levels at the local teams

Looking at both staffing levels and availability levels, we see that a number of regional units and local teams are characterised by a high staffing level combined with a low availability level, while other regional units and local teams have a low staffing level combined with a high availability level. See Figure 11.





Varied combinations of staffing and availability levels among regional units and local teams

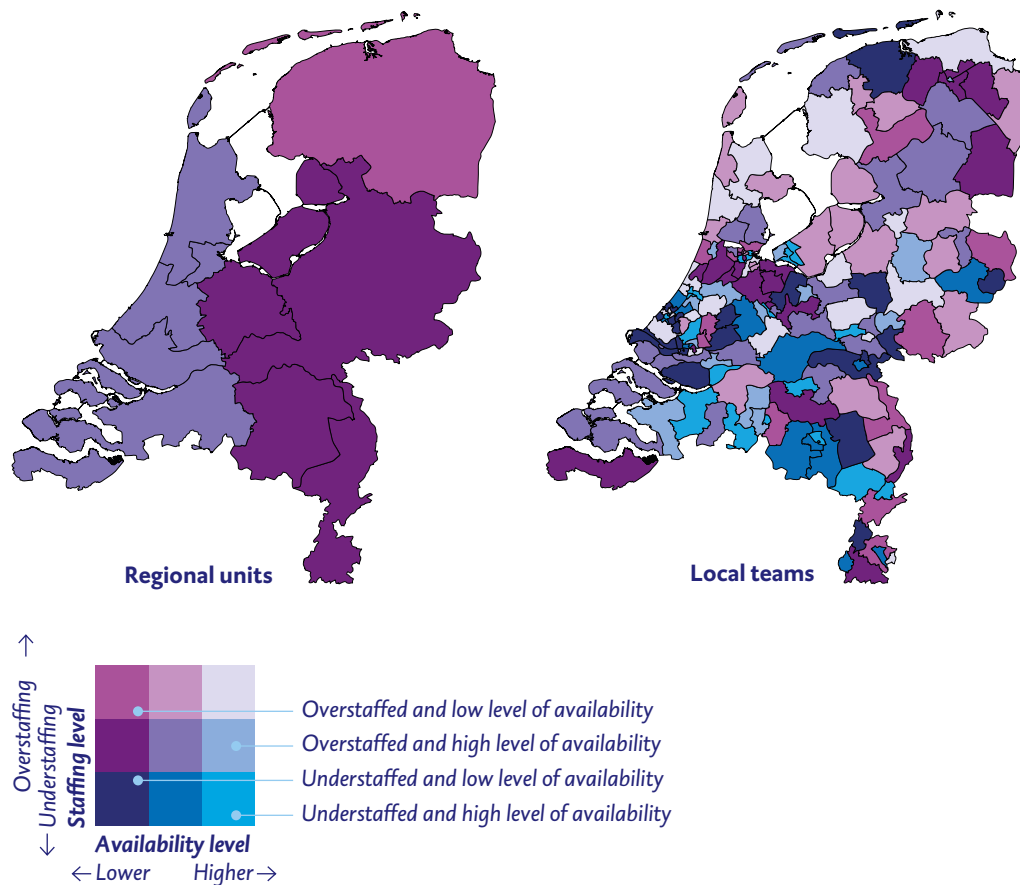


Figure 11 Variation in staffing and availability levels among the regional units and local teams

Local teams with a low staffing level combined with a low availability level, i.e. represented by a dark blue area in the above figure, would appear to be suffering from two problems at once: not only are they understaffed, but the level of availability among their staff is lower than average. Within every regional unit, there are local teams with problems in relation to either staffing or availability levels, or both. This underlines the need to look at staffing levels and availability levels *in conjunction with one another*.

'On paper, we're overstaffed. That means that we have to supply [staff] to other regional units that are understaffed on paper. But we have a high rate of sickness absence, as well as a large number of staff who are not able to respond to emergency calls because they are either pregnant or injured. These aspects are not taken into account, which means that we still have to make up the numbers. It hurts to hear people say that we're overstaffed.'





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2.5 Models for calculating staff availability

In addition to using the tables in the Police Performance Dashboard to calculate the availability of staff, the police also use a second model for this purpose. Although still under development, this is a simulation model that is capable of generating projections of future availability levels (among other things). The model calculates the availability only of staff (including trainee police officers) whose duties include responding to emergency calls. The underlying principle is that the police need to know about the availability of these members of staff in particular, given that emergency response is something that cannot be deferred to a later time and which is performed on a round-the-clock basis. In other words, information on the availability of staff for duties that can be rostered (and, if necessary, postponed to a later time or date) has a lower priority.

One important difference between the simulation model and the dashboard, apart from the restriction of the former to emergency services, lies in the number of factors that are taken into account in calculating the level of availability. The only factors incorporated in the Police Performance Dashboard are leave, sickness absence, and absence due to training. The new models takes more factors into account, including, for example, the amount of time spent by trainees on training, time spent on sport during working hours, and time spent in briefing sessions and meetings. Certain aspects are also treated differently: for example, the simulation model does take account of the amount of time spent by staff on training.

As a result of these differences, the simulation model produces a different figure for the average level of staff availability, i.e. 64.5%. This is considerably lower than the percentage we mentioned earlier, i.e. 71.4% (which only took account of sickness absence, leave and training). Figure 12 compares the results of the two methods of calculating the non-availability of staff.





The police use two models for calculating the non-availability of staff

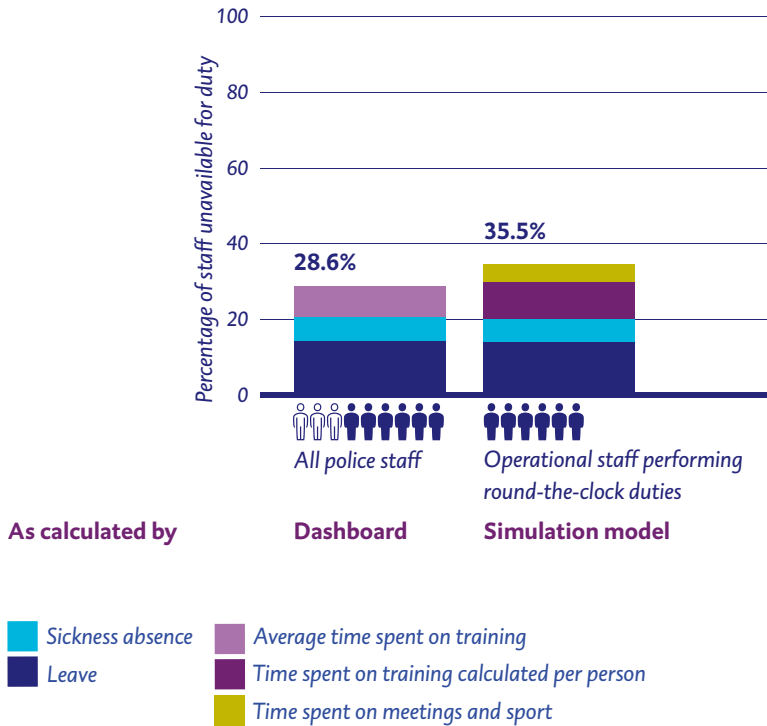


Figure 12 The differences between the dashboard and the simulation model

2.6 Availability levels at the Limburg regional unit

We encountered the same differences in the methods used for calculating staff availability at the Limburg regional unit as those described above. As with the simulation model discussed above, the Limburg regional unit only takes account of ‘operational staff performing round-the-clock duties’ in calculating availability. The unit also factors in the amount of time spent on meetings and briefing sessions (72 hours per person), and on training courses (32 hours spent practising firearm use + 72 hours on other training courses, again per person). Finally, trainee police officers are assumed to be available for 15% of their time.

Taking all of this into account, the figure thus generated for staff availability at the Limburg regional unit is 9.3 percentage points lower than the figure generated for Limburg by the nationwide model.⁸ The differences between the nationwide figures and those calculated by the Limburg regional unit are shown in Figure 13. The Police Performance Dashboard suggests that between 66.8% and 75.7% of the staff of local teams are available for duty. According to the model used by the Limburg regional unit, the availability of staff working for the local teams ranges from 58.6% to 64.7% of the actual staffing level.





Wide discrepancies between the data on staff availability generated by the dashboard and the unit's own figures

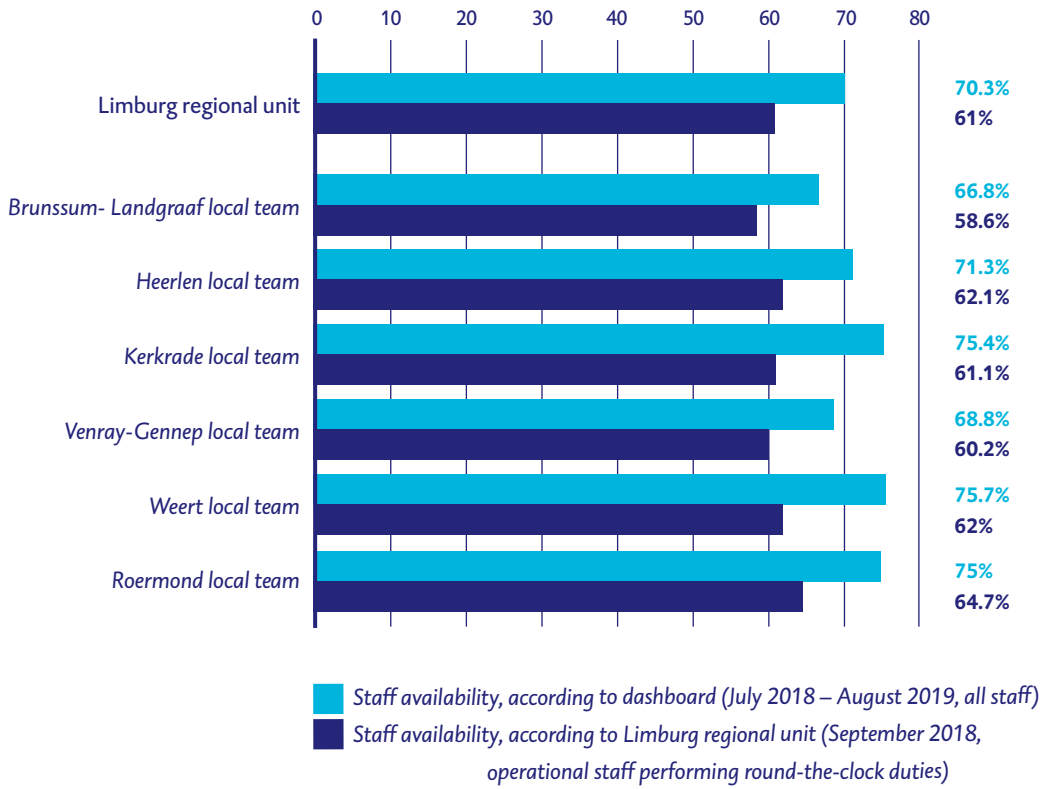


Figure 13 Staff availability at the Limburg regional unit: dashboard data compared with the unit's own figures



Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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3 The deployability of police personnel

Our interviews with staff from the regional units made clear that team managers need detailed information on the degree to which their staff (a) are available for duty at different times, and (b) are fully qualified to perform the specific duties assigned to them. In order to make the right decisions about the performance of police duties and the distribution of staff members among the team, team managers need more than just information on staff availability. They also need to know about the number of staff who are exempted from night shifts, the distribution of fixed days off among team members, the number of staff temporarily transferred to another team or deployed on other activities (such as the number of staff allocated to the riot squad) and the number of staff who have not passed a test and are therefore not authorised to be deployed on duties for which the use of force may be required. In other words, they need to have information on the *deployability* of the available staff. This chapter examines the factors that determine the deployability of police personnel.

3.1 The definition of deployability

The police define the term ‘deployability’ as ‘the degree to which staff are capable of performing certain duties, depending on the date, time, duration and location, and on their own role and expertise’. In other words, deployability is all about certain aspects that affect the availability of members of staff at specific *times*, or for specific *duties*, or in a specific *location*. See Figure 14.





Deployability of police personnel

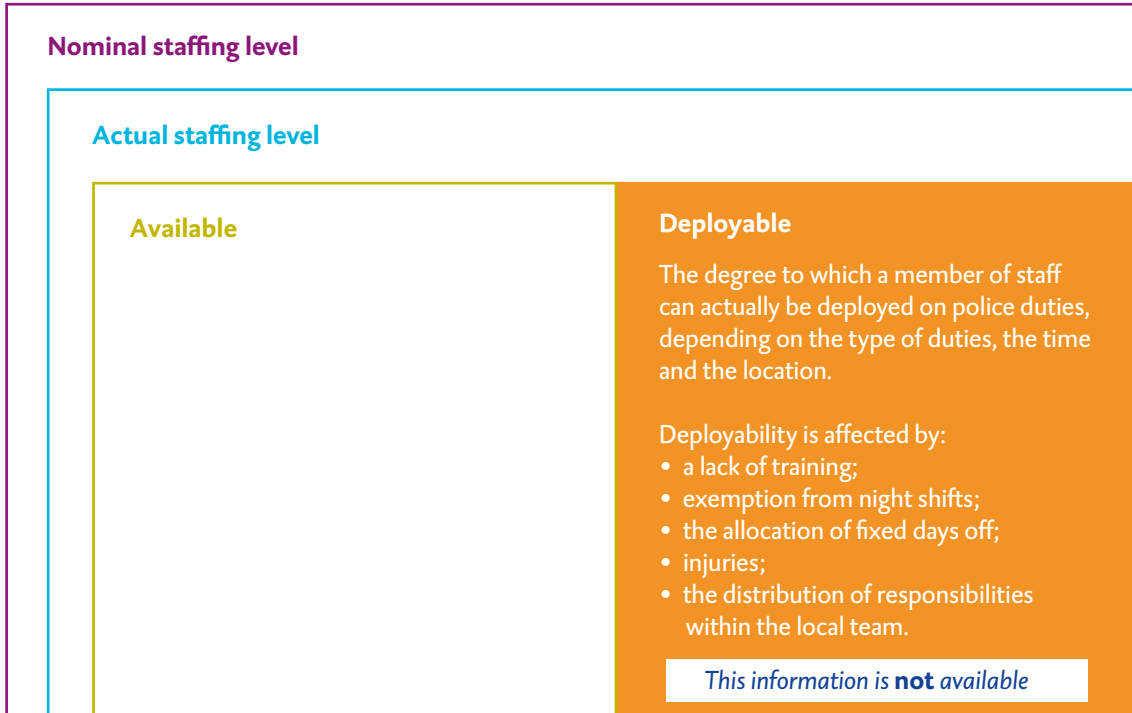


Figure 14 Deployability

Deployability is not the same as availability. This is because a member of staff who is available for duty but cannot be deployed on a specific task, at a specific time or in a specific location, remains deployable on another task, at another time or in another location. In other words, there is no change in the level of individual availability. This is why it is not possible to factor these variables into the figure for the average level of staff availability. If certain members of a team have a low level of deployability, this necessarily places greater pressure on the other members of the team, thus creating a risk of an excessive burden being placed on a small group of staff. This is a vicious circle that can ultimately lead to a reduced level of availability, for example as a result of absence due to illness.

If the level of deployability were to be expressed in figures, the data would make clear that the number of staff of a regional unit of local team who are both available and properly qualified to perform a specific duty at a specific time or in a specific location, may not be the same as the number of staff listed as available. Not much data is available on staff deployability and police databases do not provide a clear picture of the level of staff deployability. Team managers need this information, however, and use their own spreadsheets for this purpose.





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3.2 Factors that affect staff deployability

The following sections examine various factors that are capable of having either a positive or a negative impact on the deployability of police personnel.

3.2.1 Injury or failure to pass tests

If a police officer is injured, suffers from PTSS (post-traumatic stress syndrome) or fails to pass a particular test, this means that he or she may not be deployed on certain duties. For example, the officer may not be able, either temporarily or permanently, to undertake police patrols or to respond to emergency calls. On the other hand, he or she may be able to work on crime investigations or deal with incoming crime reports. If he or she can indeed be assigned to such duties, this will not affect his or her deployability, as the officer is non-deployable only on certain specific duties (such as police patrols) and is in fact more easily deployable on other duties (such as desk jobs).

3.2.2 Fixed time off ('working hours modalities')

Certain factors may also affect the deployability of police personnel at certain *specific times*. This has a particularly marked impact on duty rosters. Police personnel are entitled to apply for what are known as 'working hours modalities', i.e. agreements on specific days of the week or specific times when they are off duty. This means, for example, that the local team for which the officer works cannot deploy him or her on the day or time in question.

'There's an awful lot to bear in mind when you're drawing up duty rosters. A lot of colleagues like to have Mondays off, for example.'

Not all staff are granted the same 'modalities', which means that there are certain days on which many team members can be deployed, but equally other days on which only a small number of staff are deployable. Obviously, this creates a vicious circle of rostering problems. After all, if a large number of staff have every Friday evening off, this necessarily means that the other team members are on duty virtually every Friday evening. If they object to always having to work on Friday evenings, they then apply for a modality themselves, resulting in a further reduction in the number of staff available for duty on Friday evenings.

'I don't have any working-hours modalities myself and feel that too many are granted. That means that I get the worst shifts. I have to work on all the evenings when my colleagues are off duty. But I don't want to apply for a modality just for the sake of it. I've already got an exemption from nights shifts and I don't have any young children or a wife who's out at work. That would mean applying for a modality just to make life easier for myself.'





Staff are also entitled to apply for a ‘9-hour modality’, which allows them to work 9-hour shifts instead of 8-hour shifts. As a result, they work fewer shifts in each period. Because 8-hour shifts are the norm and because they generally start at fixed times, a 9-hour modality leads in practice to overlaps at changeover times. This means that there are three one-hour overlaps during the course of a 24-hour day, during which more staff are at work than is actually necessary. In other words, this creates a less than ideal situation in practice. Clearly, more efficient use could be made of staff time.

3.2.3 Temporary reassignment of police officers to other units

According to our calculations, 1.7% of police personnel have been reassigned to other duties, either temporarily or permanently, for example as a result of being seconded to another organisational unit. In most cases, they are still included in calculations of their own team’s staffing level, even though they are in fact working for a different entity and are hence not available for deployment on the duties performed by their own local team. At the same time, the staff in question are obviously available to the entity to which they have been reassigned, where they have the effect of raising the level of staff availability. Other members of staff are regularly assigned to external duties, such as the riot squad or the Surveillance and Protection Department. As a result, they may not be available for duty during a number of shifts in each period, sometimes without any warning. They remain available to the police force as a whole, but not to their own local team. The amount of time officers spend on these external duties tends to vary.

‘We’re supposed to have a staff of 200, but they’re simply not there. A lot of people on our payroll actually work in other locations. Or they may have certain duties that they have to perform for other units. Some of them have been employed for many years now on other duties, like helping volunteers.’

‘You see on the roster that certain people have been seconded to other duties, and you wonder: ‘Where on earth is he off to?’ Some colleagues are seconded to the asylum seekers’ centre in Ter Apel, others are posted to the Frisian Islands, while others may be on duty during the annual sailing regatta in Friesland.’

Members of local teams who have trained as riot police spend an average of 10% of their time on riot squad duties. This means that these officers are not available for deployment on local team duties for about one shift every fortnight.





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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There are also longer-lasting secondments, during which a member of a local team is not available for deployment on local team duties during a relatively long period of time, given that he or she is working for a different organisational unit. Obviously, this has the effect of raising the level of staff availability at the other organisational unit. The figures on staffing and availability levels presented in chapter 2 take account of staff seconded to another unit for a *relatively long period of time*.

3.2.4 Exemption from night shifts

Staff aged 55 and above are entitled to apply for exemption from night shifts. This does not affect the availability of the individuals concerned, as they remain available during daytime hours. But it does affect their deployability. And it also affects the rest of the team, as the other team members then need to work nights themselves. If a relatively large proportion of local team members are exempted from night shifts, this may result in the ‘non-exempt’ team members being placed under severe roster pressure.

‘Some of my colleagues don’t work nights. They’re relatively old, so it makes sense. But I’m relatively young, which means that I get assigned to night shifts fairly often, and doing a lot of night shifts is very demanding work. There aren’t all that many people available during the daytime to respond to emergency calls, and there are even fewer at night.’

In other words, although they do not reduce the availability of the team as a whole, such situations do reduce the level of availability at night, which means that a small group of people have to perform the relatively demanding night-time duties and which makes it more difficult to roster staff on night shifts. Obviously, the concomitant effect is that there are more than enough staff available for filling the daytime rosters.

As Figure 15 shows, the percentage of staff in the regional units who are exempt from night shifts tends to vary widely.





Percentage of staff exempt from night shifts ranges from 7.9% to 20.2%

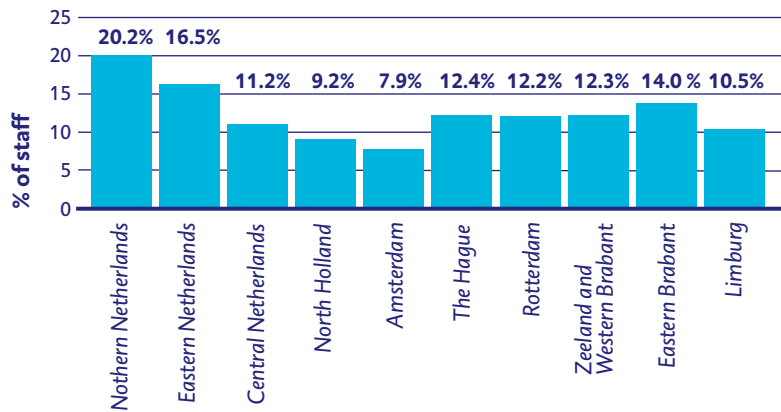


Figure 15 Percentage of staff exempt from night shifts, per regional unit

This means, for example, that, in the case of teams in which a relatively large proportion of staff are exempt from night shifts, community police officers (who in theory only work daytime shifts) are called upon more often to perform emergency services at night. The corollary is that they then have less time to undertake community policing (see also Terpstra and Evers, 2019).

'We're very flexible and good at solving problems. I work as a community policy officer, so it's simply a matter of cancelling my appointments. I'm often rostered on daytime shifts, so it's easy to transfer to another shift because no one else is available for the morning or night shift.'





4 Staff availability and depolyability in relation to police duties

In order to know whether a particular regional unit has enough staff, we need to know (a) what duties the unit performs, and (b) how many staff are both available and properly qualified to perform the duties in question. The next step is to compare these figures with a benchmark. The term used by the police in this connection is a ‘waterline’.⁹ This chapter examines the precise meaning of this term and how it is currently used by the police force.

4.1 The waterline: a threshold value for policing

The ‘waterline’ stands for the minimum number of FTEs required at all times by the local teams, i.e. even during major, national events and crises, to guarantee a minimum level of policing (otherwise known as the ‘core staffing level’). At the same time, it also indicates how many members of the team may be deployed in support of colleagues in another part of the country. The underlying principle here is that police work may be divided into three levels of priority, and that a team or unit may on no account fall under the minimum level, i.e. level 0.

Minimum level of police duties (level 0)

The minimum level of police duties include the day-to-day coordination of work, the distribution of duties, emergency services (i.e. responding to emergency calls), dealing with arrested persons, taking and processing calls and reports, analysing information in the control room, undertaking community policing, manning the police station, investigating crime and enforcing law and order in accordance with administrative agreements and with a view to maintaining public order.

We found that the regional units included in our audit compared the figures on staff availability with these three levels, on the assumption that this would indicate whether sufficient numbers of staff were available to perform the duties in question. However, the level of deployability is not factored into these figures. In other words, the proportion of police personnel actually available for deployment on specific duties may at certain times be smaller or larger than the number of staff who are theoretically available.

Figure 16 shows an example of a waterline calculation in relation to the availability for duty of the staff of six basis teams in the Limburg regional unit. The line shows the availability of the teams (excluding trainee police officers) as calculated by the regional unit itself (see section 1.6). Level 0 represents the core activities that the police must be able to perform at all times. Level 1 represents events, social policing, crime detection and regular training





commitments. Level 2 consists of those activities that the local team is free to undertake at its own discretion in conjunction with the competent authorities.

Not all local teams reach the waterline at all levels

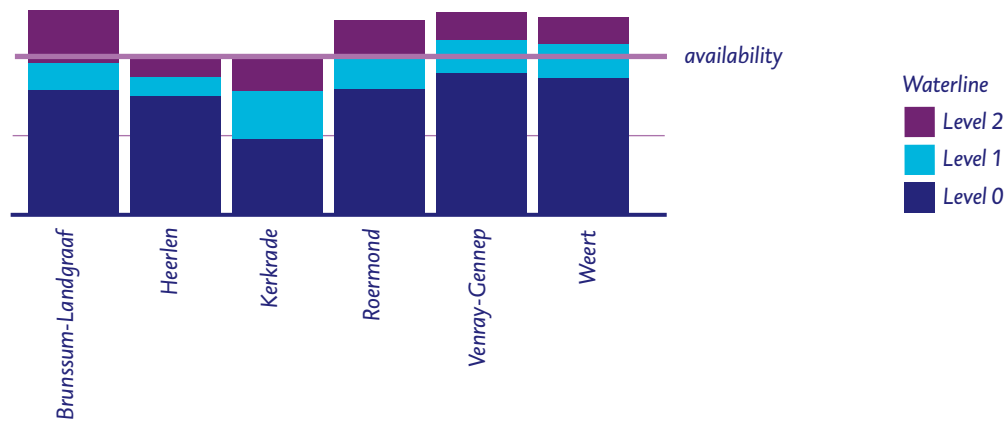


Figure 16 Level of staff availability (the straight line) compared with the waterline

Figure 16 shows the average availability of operational staff (i.e. the purple line) and the average duties performed in 2019 by six local teams in the Limburg regional unit. The figure shows that all six local teams have enough staff available to guarantee their ability to perform their core activities. This does not apply, however, to level 1 and 2 activities. The Weert local team, for example, cannot perform almost half of its level 1 duties and any of its level 2 duties. Most teams are unable to perform level 2 duties, the only exceptions being the local teams in Heerlen and Kerkrade.

4.2 Level of availability by period or day

One of the advantages of using the waterline as a benchmark for staffing levels is that it can be broken down according to a particular period or day. Figure 17 shows staffing levels at one of the local teams in the Limburg regional unit, broken down into 13 four-week periods in 2019.





This local team does not have enough staff available to reach level 0 of the waterline in every period

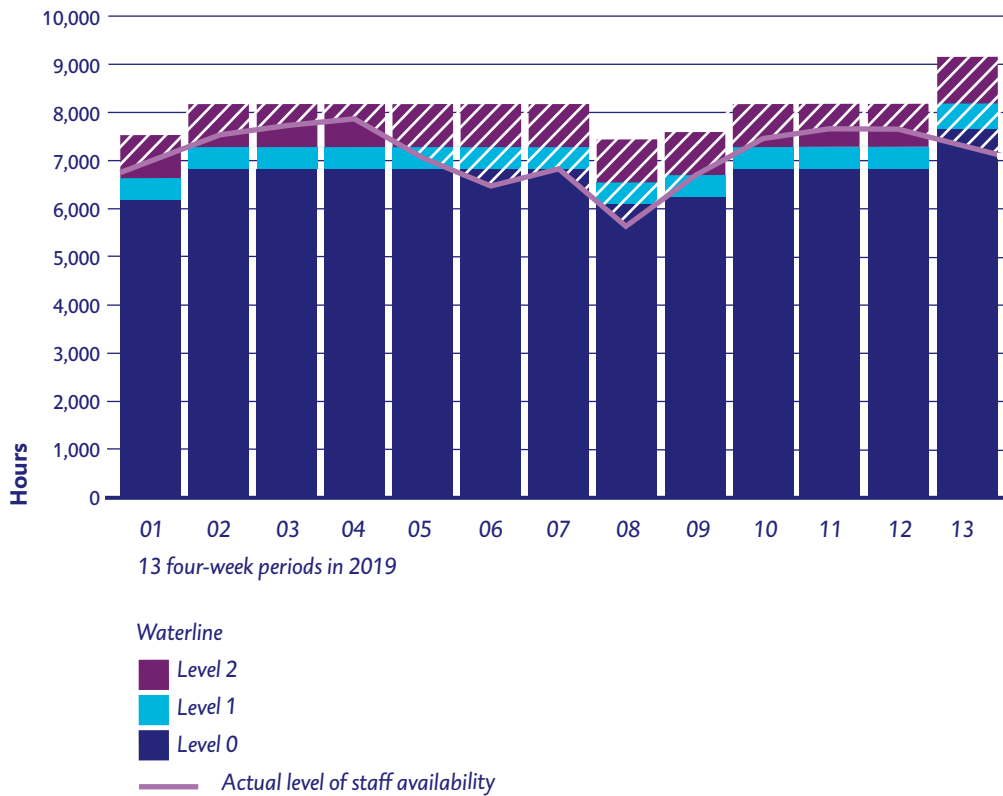


Figure 17 Level of staff availability (line) in a local team compared with the waterline, by period

The figure shows that it is particularly hard to achieve level 0 during the summer months. The level of availability in periods 6 (i.e. from mid-May to mid-June) and 8 (from mid-July to mid-August) is not sufficient to enable the local team to perform its level 0 duties. The figure also shows that the availability of staff to enable the local team to perform its level 1 and 2 duties also varies from one period to another.

‘Staff deployment is based on the threshold level – the lowest level of the waterline. There’s no room for extras. If someone’s missing due to illness, then there’s no one to fill the gap. And if people are called out for riot squad duty, fewer staff are available for the local team. And that means working with a smaller group of people than we’re supposed to. With staffing levels on the decline, it’s getting harder to perform police duties.’





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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4.3 Level of deployability by period or day

If we were able to include the level of deployability in the calculation of the waterline, it would become clear that the local teams are not able to reach the waterline at all times of the month. This is due in part to exemptions from night shifts, leading to fewer staff being available at night, as well as to certain fixed days off (or ‘working hours modalities’), which means that fewer staff are available on certain days than on other days.

4.4 Different interpretations in different regions

Different units in the police force tend to interpret the term ‘waterline’ in different ways, for example as regards the precise definition of what constitutes a minimum level of policing. The way in which the Limburg and Central Netherlands regional units interpret the waterline and define what constitutes the minimum level of policing, for example, is based primarily on experience and historical practice.

There are also big differences between the regional units in terms of the type of work they perform. As a result, the waterline as it applies to one regional unit cannot simply be transposed to another regional unit. In some cases, there are even wide discrepancies between local teams operating within one and the same regional unit.





5 Managing staff availability and deployability

This chapter examines the question of whether the police take sufficient account of information on staff availability and deployability, in formulating HR policy and setting priorities. We discuss the need felt by the regional units and local teams for combined information on both availability and deployability. We also discuss the scope for improving the way in which staff availability and deployability are managed. In this connection, we differentiate between management activities aimed at making the most efficient use of staff resources with the aid of information on availability and deployability, and management activities aimed at actually raising the levels of availability and deployability. But we begin by taking a brief look at the way in which responsibilities are distributed in the police force.

5.1 Who is responsible for the police?

The Minister of Justice and Security is responsible for police performance. The national police commissioner is in charge of the day-to-day management of the police, on which he reports to the Minister. The national police commissioner is also responsible for HR policy. At a regional level, policy and operational matters are controlled by the local competent authorities, i.e. the mayor and the public prosecutor.

Roles and responsibilities

The Minister of Justice and Security

The Minister of Justice and Security sets the financial and technical parameters for the organisation, operation and development of the police system. He or she also prepares the budget, the long-term forecast, the annual accounts, the management plan and the annual report, and sets the nominal staffing levels. Once every four years, acting in consultation with the Board of Procurators General and the mayors representing the police regions, the Minister also sets the national policy objectives for the police. The Minister also meets with the mayors representing the police regions and the Chair of the Board of Procurators General four times a year to discuss police performance. These meetings are also attended by the national police commissioner.

The national police commissioner

The national police commissioner is in charge of the day-to-day management of the police. He or she operates within the framework set by the Minister of Justice and Security and reports to the Minister on the way in which he or she has discharged his or her duties and responsibilities. See the organisational chart in section 1.7.





The local competent authorities

The local competent authorities consist of the mayor of the municipality in question together with the public prosecutor (or the chief public prosecutor, as the case may be). This local triumvirate, i.e. comprising the mayor, the public prosecutor and the police, generally represented by a local police commissioner) decide on the use of police resources and the policy on police operations.

5.2 Better information needed on availability and deployability

One of our audit findings is that the information on the availability and deployability of police personnel is *not consistent*. It is *also incomplete*. This section explains what we mean by this.

The police have not adopted a generally accepted position on the question of which variables are important in order to obtain a clear picture of the number of staff who are available for duty. This is because the information requirements and interests vary from one organisational unit to another. Regional units mainly require detailed information on the actual availability and deployability of operational personnel, whereas those responsible for managing police capacity at a national level take a more strategic view of staff availability.

The police use a number of different ways of calculating staff availability and this is reflected by the audit findings. The level of staff availability as calculated by the Limburg regional unit, for example, is 9.3 percentage points lower than the figure cited in the Police Performance Dashboard (see section 2.6 in chapter 2).

We also found that the information available on the availability and deployability of police personnel is not complete. The main need among the regional units and team managers is for more information on staff deployability. Information on deployability is required not simply in order to draw up duty rosters, but also in order to know how many people are actually both available for duty and qualified to perform the duties the police need to perform at certain specific times and in certain specific locations.

As things stand at present, the models used by the regional units for calculating the availability of police personnel do not take account of staff deployability. Team managers use their own spreadsheets as sources of information on the availability and deployability of members of their teams. The national databases and statistics are only of limited use to them.





Terms and information needed for management purposes

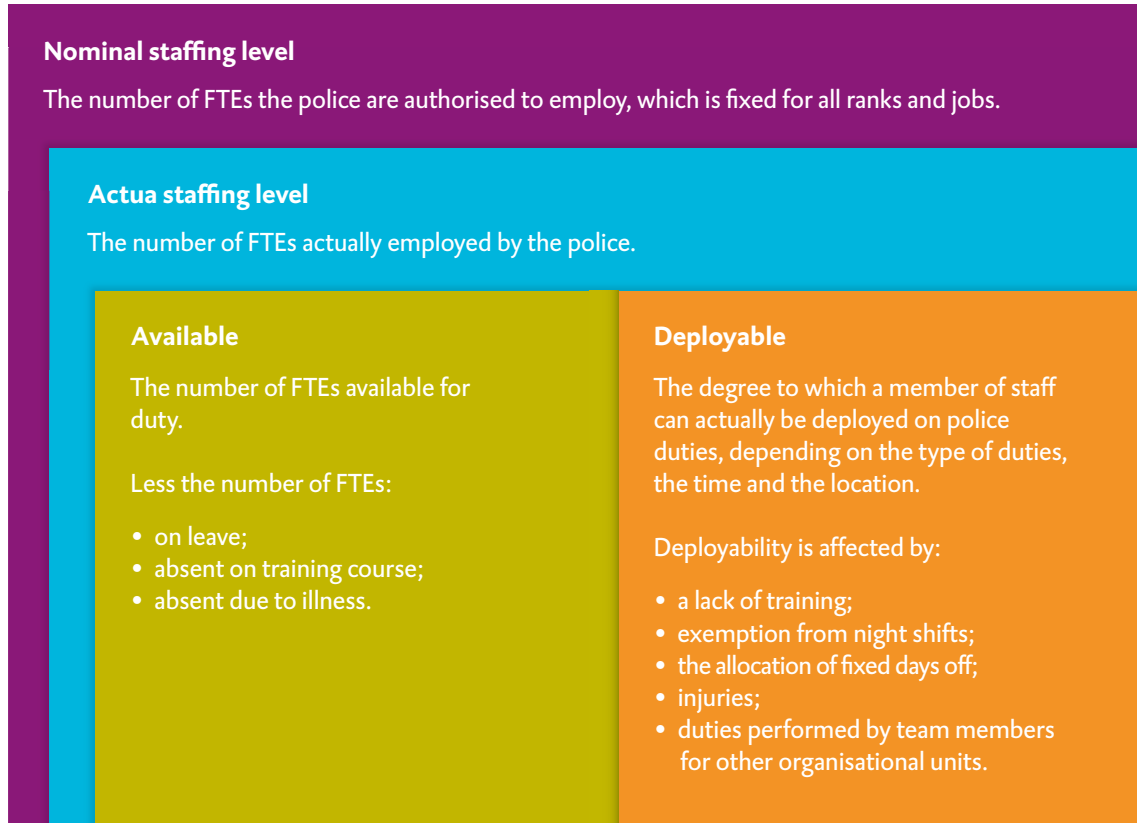


Figure 18 Information on availability and deployability needed by the police

As the national police management do not have any information on the deployability of police personnel, they have a *distorted picture* of who is available for duty and qualified to perform the duties assigned to them as compared with the information available to regional unit managers and local team managers. As a result, managers at different levels have different types of information available to them and end up talking at cross-purposes in deciding on the deployment of staff resources.

Ideally, information on the availability and deployability of police personnel should be structured in the same ways at all levels of management. Only if this is the case can priorities be set in a consistent manner. Consistently structured information also allows police personnel to be better distributed over the various organisational units.

5.3 Staff availability and deployability need to be better managed

The police have only recently started to produce information on staff availability. As from 2020, the regional units are supposed to include a section on staff capacity in their annual





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plans, containing information on staffing levels, staff availability and the demand for policing services. They must describe how they make choices in their work, explain how they strike a balance between the duties they are required to perform and the number of staff available to them, state whether they have acted contrary to national agreements (and if so, why), and indicate what forms of support they have requested from other organisational units. The idea is that this should result in the production of comparable data for the police force as a whole, thus enabling as realistic as possible projections to be made about what will be needed where in the future. However, figures on staff deployability are not currently included in the data collected for this purpose.

Even with the information that is currently available, figures on staff availability and deployability could play a more prominent role in HR policy and in the prioritisation of police duties than is presently the case. We found that the main concern of the national police management at the moment lies in bringing nominal and actual staffing levels into equilibrium with each other. The overriding issue here is whether the police force is adequately staffed.

In other words, only limited action is taken to regulate the level of availability. The police have not made any internal arrangements about the type of action that needs to be taken in the event of staff availability falling below a critical level. Although the waterline is used as a benchmark and hence as a starting point for a form of management, it does not feature in the policy on the distribution of staff resources. For the time being, policy is geared primarily towards reducing the level of sickness absence.

5.3.1 The distribution of staff resources

We found that staff availability and deployability do not currently play a role in the distribution of staff resources, for example in the distribution of trainee police officers or in the secondment of officers to other regional units. We saw in chapter 2 that the level of staff availability is not the same throughout the force. The same applies to understaffing and overstaffing, both of which are not evenly distributed, and there are also too many high-ranking officers (resulting in an imbalance in staffing levels). A number of teams also have a relatively large number of relatively old staff on their payroll, which leads to a relatively large proportion of staff with reduced working hours on account of their eligibility for partial retirement leave and exemption from night shifts. Other teams have a relatively large number of trainees, whose availability for duty is limited.

There is no easy way for the police to improve the distribution of staff who are already on their payroll, given that the law prevents them from forcing staff to move to other units (see article 1 (1) of the General Legal Status (Police) Decree).





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5.3.2 Reducing sickness absence

Police policy on staff availability is geared mainly towards reducing sickness absence. The police have drawn up a plan of action with the objective of reducing the rate of absenteeism to 5.9% in 2023 (the rate was 6.9% in 2018) and further reducing the rate in the years thereafter (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2018a; Police, 2018b). The national police management are actively seeking to curb absenteeism: the need to reduce sickness absence has been a recurring item on the agenda of all meetings between the national police management and team managers since 2016. There are wide differences between different teams and our auditors found that team managers are using all sorts of different ways of reducing sickness absence, with varying degrees of success.

5.4 Different solutions proposed by regional units and local teams

We found that, although staff availability and deployability are important issues in the regional units we audited, not all regional units succeed in pursuing effective policies on managing staff availability and deployability. The regional units are keen to find ways of effectively analysing staff availability and deployability. As we saw in chapter 3, the Limburg regional unit uses its own data on staff deployability (which do not as yet include clear information on staff deployability). The Central Netherlands regional unit uses the national data on staff availability, alongside which it has also developed a supplementary tool for recording 'working hours modalities' (i.e. fixed days or half-days off) in order to build up a more accurate picture of the deployability of the staff working for the unit.

There is also scope for improving the way in which the information currently available on staff availability (such as that generated by the supplementary tool referred to above) is used in practice. To date, virtually all requests for working hours modalities have been granted. The employer is entitled to turn down a request for a modality only if there are 'compelling work-related arguments' against it (under article 12 of the General Legal Status (Police) Decree) (Police, 2015b). This requires accurate information on staff availability and deployability and on the range of police duties performed by the unit in question.

'We try to protect staff modalities as well as we can. I'm not really in a position to reject a request for modalities, as I haven't got any formal grounds on which to do so. Our staff complement is still above our nominal staffing level of 99 FTEs.'

The regional units have taken various steps either to enhance the deployability of their staff or, as the case may be, to make more efficient use of the staff they have available to them.





Here again, the two regional units we audited each have their own way of dealing with this. This is little sharing of good practices. Examples of tools used by regional units and local teams are described in the following paragraphs.

The Limburg regional unit is trying to produce a standard waterline for the local teams, so as to build up a more uniform picture of the ability of the available staff to cope with the demand for policing services. This should enable team managers to work together in dealing with deployability problems. The team managers in Limburg are also planning to talk to staff who are exempt from night shifts: a large number of staff who are exempt from night shifts are prepared to do the occasional night shift provided that they have some say in rostering decisions. As a third example, certain members of staff working in Limburg have been redeployed on other tasks. For example, staff who used to work on lengthy investigations for the regional crime squad have been transferred to more operational inquiries into common crimes. This is one way of reducing the local teams' workload. Finally, the Limburg regional unit is also trying to distribute attendance of training courses over the year and to ensure that staff think carefully when choosing from the range of training courses on offer.

The Central Netherlands regional unit is also trying to boost cooperation among its local teams, for example by organising more frequent meetings as part of a specially designed consultative framework. A number of local teams have also adopted a new approach to their duty rosters, which means that night shifts do not now last as long as they used to in the past. The experience is that fewer officers are needed during the latter part of the night.

5.5 The role of availability and deployability in decision-making by the local triumvirate

We did not perform an extensive audit of decision-making procedures during local tripartite talks about the police, and did not look in detail at the role played by police availability and deployability in these procedures. The regional units and local teams included in our audit all reported that the competent authorities made only limited use of the figures on staff availability and deployability. One of the points that also emerged from our interviews with local police commissioners and regional unit commissioners was that they still find it hard to say 'no' to the competent authorities when asked to assign officers to certain duties for which they do not actually have any staff available. As a result, the police end up doing what they have been asked to do, meaning either that certain other duties are neglected or that staff have to work overtime.





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In short, the regional units and local teams still face a dilemma in terms of how they should engage with the competent authorities on the issue of staff availability and deployability. To complicate matters further, the police use different figures to measure the availability of police personnel and do not have sufficiently accurate information on the level of staff deployability. This makes it hard for the regional units and local teams to respond with reasoned arguments to standpoints adopted by the competent authorities and the national police management (see also Andersson Elffers Felix, 2015; Ministry of Finance, 2017).





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6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Basically, police deployment is all about ensuring that the right police officers are in the right places at the right time. In order to achieve this, police commissioners must have access to adequate information enabling them to take both operational and strategic decisions.

Our audit team found that the national police management in the Netherlands does not have access to adequate, consistent information on the number of staff who are both available and sufficiently qualified, in order to allow such decisions to be taken in the best possible way.

Our audit showed that, on average, the level of staff availability during the period between mid-July 2018 and mid-July 2019 was 71.4%.¹⁰ In practice, staff availability is unevenly distributed over the regional units and local teams. As a result, police forces in certain areas are finding it hard to perform the many duties they are expected to perform. The figure for staff availability among the local teams ranges from 64.4% to a maximum of 77.8%.¹¹

The aim of the 2012 reorganisation was to enhance police performance by creating a unity of structure, management, policy and control. Our conclusions are not based on an assumption that this situation would follow within a short space of time. Indeed, our advice to the government and parliament at the time was that the police force should be allowed the time needed to implement the reorganisation. The efficient use of police resources is no simple matter, in part because of the terms and conditions under which police officers are employed and also given the fact that their deployment is subject to local control. Now that the police force has been subsumed into a single organisation, the national police management should be able to pursue a policy of improving staff availability and deployability and reducing the differences between teams. Indeed, the national police commissioner has the power to do so. There is, however, a need to improve the way in which availability and deployability are managed. In order to bring this about, figures on staff deployability must be included in the information available at the highest national level. However, this is not sufficiently the case at present, which means that the desired practical situation has not yet been achieved.

Imbalances in staffing levels

We found that the main focus of the national police management currently lies on restoring the balance between actual and nominal staffing levels. The key question here is whether the workforce is large enough. Both at an aggregate level and at the regional units,





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actual staffing levels are reasonably consistent with nominal staffing levels. However, the figures conceal an underlying problem, which is that certain senior ranks are overstaffed, whereas other (i.e. lower) ranks are understaffed. This situation is the result of the swingeing changes in staffing brought about by the police reorganisation in 2012, since when there has been an imbalance in staffing levels. During the period under review, the average level of overstaffing was 11,595 FTEs and the average level of understaffing was 10,659 FTEs. We calculated that these imbalances added at least €88 million per annum to police salary costs than would have been the case if there had been no such imbalances. In this sense, the police are still feeling the effects of the reorganisation in their day-to-day work. Moreover, it is difficult for the police to improve the distribution of staff already employed by the police, given that staff cannot be compelled to accept transfers to another unit.

Availability and deployability

The fact that the national police management use a 'dashboard' to analyse the current situation in relation to staff availability is a major step forward. Unfortunately, the dashboard only generates information on the number of staff who are available for duty. This is despite the fact the regional unit and local team managers also need to have information on whether or not their staff are deployable on specific duties at specific times and in specific places, in the light of their expertise, skills, roster preferences, exemption from night shifts, etc. Some team managers keep a record of this information in their own spreadsheets.

As the national police management do not have any information on the deployability of police personnel, they have a *distorted picture* of who is available for duty. As a result, managers at different levels have different types of information available to them and end up talking at cross-purposes in deciding on the deployment of staff resources. This prevents the police from taking well-informed decisions about police duties.

Information on the availability and deployability of police personnel should be structured in the same ways at all levels of the police force. Only if this is the case can priorities be set in a consistent manner throughout the force. Consistently structured information also allows police personnel to be better distributed over the various organisational units. Such information will also a well-informed dialogue to take place between the various levels of the police force on the use of police resources. Finally, it will also enable the competent authorities to take better informed decisions on the use of police resources.





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We also believe that information on both availability and deployability should play a more prominent role both in strategic HR policy and in setting priorities. Our audit team found that the regional units have taken a wide range of measures to improve staff availability and deployability and to ensure that better decisions are taken on the use of staff resources. The problem is that the national police management are too much inclined to view problems with staff deployability as a matter for the local teams to resolve. They do not sufficiently recognise that these problems should be factored into decision-making at a national level on police duties and the priorities in this respect.

6.2 Recommendations

The national police management could do more to improve the management of staff availability and deployability at a national level. There is a need to reduce the differences between teams in this connection. In order to bring this about, figures on staff deployability should be included in the information available at the highest national level. The competent authorities would then be able to use consistently presented, accurate information to prioritise police duties at all levels.

As the minister responsible both for creating the framework within which the police operate and for managing the police, we urge the Minister of Justice and Security to take the following action:

- Create a mechanism for generating consistent, practical information on the deployability of police officers. This could take the form of an informative dashboard showing the operational reality and supporting informed, short-term interventions and long-term adjustments. All levels of the police force should have access to the same, consistently structured information on the impact of staff deployability on service delivery. We realise that it is not always possible to fully quantify staff deployability. For this reason, we recommend that, where necessary, information on staff deployability should be supplemented systematically with qualitative assessments.
- Agree on clear and consistently applied definitions of ‘availability’ and ‘deployability’, so that figures on the number of staff who are both available and properly qualified for police duty are based on the same criteria, at all levels and in all regions. Make sure that the definition of ‘availability’ is accepted throughout the entire police force and that it is both workable and used in practice at all levels of the organisation.
- Formulate a minimum level of availability that should apply to a regional unit or local team, and take appropriate action if this minimum level is not met or if there is a risk of it not being met. Use this minimum level of availability as the basis for temporary or additional action, where needed.





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- Make use of statistics on deployability and availability for duty to ensure that more efficient use is made of staff resources. The distribution of ‘working hours modalities’ is a good example. A nine-hour modality is not consistent with a pattern of eight-hour shifts, for example. Information on deployability and availability should play a more prominent role in the allocation of staff to regional units and local teams. It should also be reflected in HR policy, e.g. on recruitment, the intake of new staff and staff transfers.
- Staff availability and deployability should play a more prominent role in decisions on police duties and in setting priorities. Make sure that this type of information forms part of tripartite consultations with local mayors and public prosecutors, so that such meetings culminate in informed decisions with all concerned being aware of any impact such decisions may have on the availability of police officers, either in other regions or at other times.
- Help police commissioners, regional units and local teams to share more examples of good practice (for example, in relation in reducing sickness absence or allocating fixed days off) with each other.
- Try and find solutions to the problems of recurrent costs and the impact on staff availability and deployability caused by the imbalance in staffing levels. For example, look into the possibility of devising a redundancy scheme for the staff concerned, perhaps in consultation with representatives of industries facing staff shortages. This would allow the police force to strike a better balance between nominal and actual staffing levels (in both quantitative and qualitative terms) and would also enable the police budget to be spent more efficiently at the same time. Clearly, the first requirement in this respect is for the police to obtain a clearer picture of the imbalance in staffing levels. This means knowing which members of staff are affected, the time horizon of natural wastage, the recurrent cost of the imbalance in staffing levels, and the options available under employment law and the conditions that would be involved.





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7 Response and afterword

The Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner responded to the draft version of our audit report. Their responses are reproduced verbatim below. The chapter concludes with our afterword.

7.1 Response of the Minister of Justice and Security

‘On 12 December 2019, I received a copy of the draft version of your audit report, entitled ‘Police visibility: The need to improve the way in which police availability and deployability are managed’. I read your audit findings with great interest and gratitude. I would now like to respond to the report and the recommendations set out in it. As you requested, the national police commissioner has prepared his own response to your report. This is enclosed in the appendix to this letter.

The availability and deployability of police personnel are important topics of discussion in contacts between myself and the national police commissioner. These contacts should be seen in the context of the responsibilities borne by the wide range of actors involved in the police system. At a national level, the national police commissioner is responsible for actual staffing levels and for the availability of police personnel. At a local level, local police commissioners are responsible for the availability and deployability of staff. Decisions about the practical deployment of police officers are made by the local ‘triumvirate’, acting under the authority of the mayor and the public prosecutor.

Your report will be published during a period in which there has been a temporary, but nevertheless substantial, decline in the number of police officers actually available for duty. This is a point that I explained in some detail in my letter of 17 December to the House of Representatives. In the current environment, triumvirates in certain areas find themselves compelled to take extra measures relating to the deployment of police officers. When such decisions are taken, due account is taken of the current levels of police availability and deployability.

At the same time, the national police commissioner is doing his utmost to replace staff who are leaving the force and to expand police capacity, and is also seeking to improve the parameters for the availability and deployability of police personnel. Since 2016, the national police commissioner has sought to professionalise the way in which police capacity is managed. In my letter of 3 September 2019 to the House of Representatives, I explained how capacity management can help the police to regulate staff availability and deployability, for example, by making use of information from the Police Performance





Dashboard. At a national level, the national police management regulates staffing levels (for example, by controlling the influx of new recruits) and seeks to improve the parameters that need to be satisfied in order to raise the level of staff availability and deployability. Among the instruments available in this respect are the terms and conditions of employment, training requirements, and the campaign to reduce sickness absence. While plenty of progress has already been made, I fully endorse the view that further improvements still need to be made in capacity management, so that the police are able to regulate the availability and deployability of police personnel as well as possible.

Your recommendations are fully in line with the strategy adopted by the national police commissioner for improving capacity management. The commissioner intends to focus particularly on the need for terminological consistency, on using data on staff availability and deployability for capacity planning at all levels, and on ensuring that the local triumvirates take closer account of staff availability and deployability when taking decisions on police deployment.

I am aware that the reorganisation of the police force has created a situation in which some teams and ranks are still understaffed while others remain overstaffed, in quantitative and/or qualitative terms. The police force has now reached stage 2 of the reorganisation, i.e. the point at which staff may be transferred to other units only with their consent. Acting within the current constraints, the police are seeking to strike the right balance between the organisation's financial sustainability on the one hand and good employment practices and attractive career planning on the other.

Your report underlines the importance of further improving the way in which staff availability and deployability are managed. I believe that your recommendations will help the police to make strides in this respect. I have asked the national police commissioner to report to me regularly on the action he has taken to further improve capacity management and to implement the recommendations made in your report. It goes without saying that these issues will remain recurring topics of discussion in the future.'

7.2 Response of the national police commissioner

'Thank you for sending me the draft version of your audit report entitled 'Police visibility' and for giving me an opportunity to respond to this thorough audit. I am extremely grateful to your staff for their engagement and for their communication efforts during the course of the audit. Your recommendations make good sense, both to me and to everyone working





in the police force. They provide a starting point for further improving the way in which the police management and others in positions of responsibility deal with this issue. As I read your report, however, I found that I was not able to agree with a number of the conclusions. In my view, they do not follow logically from the audit and would appear to misjudge a number of key principles underlying the management of the national police force.

I would like to draw your attention in particular to your claim that the national police management in the Netherlands do not have access to consistent, adequate information on the number of staff who are both available and sufficiently qualified, in order to ensure that the best possible decisions are taken on police deployment. The same applies to your claims about decisions taken and priorities set at a national level in relation to staff deployability. As you will be aware, from the contents of letter sent by the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives on 3 September 2019 (House of Representatives, 2019-2020 session, 29628, no. 904), we differentiate between the following four terms: nominal staffing level, actual staffing level, availability and deployability. The Minister sets both the (quantitative) nominal staffing level and the way in which this is to be distributed over the various regional units. Within the confines of the nominal staffing level, the national police management regulates the actual staffing level and the parameters for staff availability and deployability (for example, by setting targets for sickness absence and training and – as the employer in conjunction with the Minister – by adjusting the terms and conditions of employment).

The regional units, in turn, not only regulate their own staffing levels, but also manage staff availability and deployability on a day-to-day basis. The management of staff deployability is closely bound up with day-to-day capacity management, with final authority lying with the competent authorities, i.e. the local mayors and public prosecutors. It goes without saying that this is all done entirely in line with the review of the Police Act by the Kuijken Committee.

All the various strata of the police force have access to information on staff availability, so that each individual stratum is able to manage its own staff. This data can be aggregated, for the entire chain from the nominal staffing level to the level of availability. Data on staff deployability are much more diverse, however, as they entail a number of other restrictions such as exemptions from night duty, working hours modalities, and so on. Information on the deployability of individual members of local teams and regional units is available at all times, so that team managers can deploy individual members of staff. This information is also available, by the way, to the national police management for policy-making purposes





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and for making policy interventions. This is borne out by the opening letter on working hours modalities drafted by the employer for the most recent round of negotiations on a new collective agreement. This is a letter to which you refer in your recommendations.

The draft version of your report creates the impression that the national police commissioners do not have sufficient information available to them to make informed decisions, and that this is where such decisions should be taken. I do not share this impression, nor do I agree with the rule implied by this statement. The fact that the managers of regional units and local teams make careful assessments, both with each other and with the competent authorities, on the (quantitative and qualitative) deployment of staff on a day-to-day basis bears witness to the fact that the information currently available enables difficult choices to be made in relation to individuals, local teams and regional units. The same applies to the national police management, who also take decisions on matters relating to staffing levels and the parameters for staff availability and deployability.

Which is not to say that there is no scope for improvement in terms of information and capacity management. As far as the latter is concerned, the need to take difficult decisions on the basis of the available information at times creates tensions, as indeed you note in your report. Against this background, many of your recommendations relate to issues on which I, too, believe that improvements need to be made. Please see the enclosure in this connection.

As a final point, your report quotes a number of costs and figures that are difficult to understand without a knowledge of the context. This applies, for example, to the figure of 17,501 FTEs as referring to the number of staff who are not available for duty on account of being on leave, etc. In my view, your calculation of the cost of the imbalances in staffing levels also fails to paint a full picture of the situation.

The main thrust of my response to your report is that a number of its conclusions are not consistent with the findings of your audit, which in turn are contradictory to the management principles espoused by the National Police. I will be pleased to explain my objections in detail during our meeting on 30 January.

7.2.1 The national police commissioner's response to the recommendations

Agree on clear and consistently applied definitions of 'availability' and 'deployability'.

A capacity management philosophy was adopted in 2018, containing a strategy and definitions of key terms. This philosophy formed the starting point for the adoption of the key terms and the implementation of a tool kit, the results of which you were able to see





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for yourself. The terms are used to determine what types of data are needed in order to make improvements to the database that are viable at national, regional and local levels. Although it is not realistic to believe that the terms will always be used in a fully uniform and consistent manner throughout the police force, we will continue to move forward on the implementation pathway.

Create a mechanism for generating consistent, practical information on the deployability of police officers.

You claim that the information on the staffing of local teams does not contain any information on staff deployability. This is not correct. The Police Performance Dashboard does contain information on exemptions from night shift, use-of-firearms certification and job restrictions (both temporary and permanent). This information is available throughout the force. In other words, there is a great deal of information available on the deployability of the staff of local teams; our aim is to add to this information in the future.

Choices about staff deployability are individual decisions that require familiarity with the staff concerned. For this reason, such choices are ideally made within the local team in question. The information in the Police Performance Dashboard helps managers to identify differences between teams and to initiate a dialogue about these differences. Every choice involves carefully weighing the interests of the job against the personal interests of the individual concerned. I intend to talk to the local police commissioners who make these appraisals with their local team and district managers, so that we are better able to understand and support each other in arriving at these difficult decisions.

Staff availability and deployability should play a more prominent role in decisions on police duties and in setting priorities.

It was precisely a desire to be able to dialogue with the competent authorities that prompted us to introduce the terms ‘availability’ and ‘deployability’, to formulate clear definitions for them, and to incorporate them in tools such as the Police Performance Dashboard. This creates opportunities for managers at all levels to dialogue with the competent authorities about how to strike the best balance between the demand for policy capacity and the resources the police are able to offer. Information on nominal and actual staffing levels does not provide an adequate basis for this. In particular, the way in which the figures for trainee police officers are incorporated in the nominal staffing level widens the gap between the actual staffing level, the level of availability and the level of deployability.





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Formulate a minimum level of availability that should apply to a regional unit or local team, and take appropriate action if this minimum level is not met or if there is a risk of it not being met.

Levels of staff availability and deployability tend to fluctuate. The same applies to the demand for police capacity. There is no universal ‘best level of staff availability’ for all types of police teams. For example, there are wide differences between teams in terms of their age composition, the size of their catchment areas, and the opportunities for receiving assistance from other teams in their day-to-day operations. If the demand for police capacity directed at a particular local team or regional unit is greater than their resources, efforts are made to bridge the gap. The provision of assistance by another team or unit is one possible solution.

The police force is taking steps to arrive at a uniform method of quantifying the core activities performed by a local team or regional unit, i.e. those activities that must be performed at all times. This will help managers to decide whether a team or unit is unable to meet the demand for police capacity at a given time, and also to assess the degree of assistance required from other units.

Make use of statistics on deployability and availability to ensure that more efficient use is made of staff resources.

Although the police force first took the recommended action some time ago, it is an issue that forms an ongoing focus of attention. I should like to draw your attention in this connection to the Operational Strength & Capacity Task Force that was set up at the end of 2019, and which has been tasked with examining ways and means of improving the recruitment, selection and training of trainee police officers so that greater operational use can be made of them. I would also like to draw your attention to the pilot ‘self-rostering’ projects, which are designed to boost staff deployability by giving them a greater say in the preparation of duty rosters.

Help police commissioners, regional units and local teams to share more examples of good practice with each other.

The development programme for ‘territory-based policing’ creates a great deal of scope for learning from other local teams (with the aid of methods such as ‘peering over the fence’) about smart ways of organising work, and also for injecting greater flexibility into duty rosters. The National Briefing on Organisational Development also regularly devotes attention to, and creates space for, best practices from the regional units. The use of energy labels for police capacity is another means of achieving this goal.





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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Try and find solutions to the problems of recurrent costs and the impact on staff availability and deployability caused by the imbalance in staffing levels.

You write in the report that the national police management are seeking to narrow the gap between nominal and actual staffing levels. In fact, this is also being done at regional and local levels. As you state, the police force has had five years, since the completion of the staff reorganisation in 2016, to redress the balance between nominal and actual staffing levels. This is a dynamic process, however – on both sides of the scales. Regular changes have been made to nominal staffing levels since 2016, on the back of increases in public spending, changes in police duties and methods, and growth in the staff complement. Under the coalition agreement signed by the third government under Prime Minister Rutte, for example, the operational strength of the police force is set to rise to 51,329 FTEs by 2023. At the same time, there have been both quantitative and qualitative changes in actual staffing levels, for example as a result of changes in competences, changes in policing and changes on the labour market. Further changes have been caused by the promotion of staff to higher pay grades as part of career planning, and agreements on terms and conditions of employment.

Some of the changes in nominal and actual staffing levels are both predictable and controllable, while others are not. For this reason, the Minister has given the police permission to apply a 2% bandwidth to the operational strength of each regional unit as from 2019. New rules have also been agreed for promotions from grade 6 to grade 8; these are intended to remove the barriers between these pay grades that were introduced in the nominal staff levels.

I regard the balance between nominal and actual staffing levels as a dynamic process that follows the long-term trends in the development of police duties and staff capacity. I intend to look at the differences between nominal and actual staffing levels (in both quantitative and qualitative terms) in the light of the long-term availability of police personnel and the changes in the nature of policing. Affordability issues also play a role in this connection. The Minister has given the police some freedom in trying to strike a balance between nominal and actual staffing levels that takes account of the need for operational strength, financial limits and the human dimension.

I have sent your staff a separate document describing a small number of points on which the report contains factual inaccuracies.'





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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7.3 Court of Audit afterword

We are pleased to read that the Minister of Justice and Security acknowledges ‘the need to improve the way in which availability and deployability are managed.’ This implies that the various operational levels of the police force must be able to share and use consistently structured information on staff availability and deployability. He says that the problems in this connection identified by our audit need to be tackled. The Minister also fully endorses the view that further improvements need to be made in capacity management, and believes that the recommendations made in the report can help the police to make progress in this respect. The Minister has asked the national police commissioner to report to him on this and has stressed that they need to keep in constant contact with each other on this point.

We were therefore somewhat surprised to read at the same time that the national police commissioner does not agree with a number of our conclusions. The national police commissioner explicitly rejects one of our main conclusions, i.e. that ‘the national police management in the Netherlands does not have access to consistent, adequate information on the number of staff who are both available and sufficiently qualified, in order to ensure that the best possible decisions are taken on police deployment’. This begs the question of how the national police commissioner is going to report to the Minister, who is expecting to see strengthening and progress, particularly in these areas.

The national police commissioner also contests our description of the principles underlying the management of the police force. He claims that the report wrongly assumes that there is an ‘implicit rule’ that informed decisions (on the deployment of police personnel) based on adequate information should be taken by senior police commissioners. But he goes on to assert that information on staff availability and deployability is needed to pursue a dialogue ‘at all levels’ with the competent authorities about how to strike the best balance between the demand for policy capacity and police resources. We believe that this is not consistent with his previous claim.

On the contrary, our report states that it is precisely the task of the national police management to optimise the way in which staff availability and deployability are managed. We are not suggesting that the national police commissioner should act alone in taking decisions on the deployment of police personnel, that he should step in a team manager’s shoes, or that all operational decisions should be taken by the national police management. The report contains a detailed discussion of the distribution of responsibilities. Against this background, we conclude that there is scope for the national police management to take





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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more nationwide measures in narrowing the gap between staff availability and staff deployability. Clear, consistent information is needed in order to do this.

We would like to point out that the police were given ample opportunities during earlier stages of the audit to correct any factual inaccuracies. The national police commissioner nonetheless sent us a table presenting various ‘factual inaccuracies and additions’. We did not adjust the contents of our report in response to these comments. For the sake of completeness, we have posted the table, together with our own comments on it, on our website.

The discrepancy between the response of the Minister of Justice and Security and that of the national police commissioner exposes a conflict between the Minister’s formal overall responsibility and the commissioner’s interpretation of his own job. It is up to the Minister – as he himself says – to pursue an ongoing dialogue with the commissioner on this point.





Summary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
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Appendixes

1. Audit methods
2. Bibliography
3. Notes





Appendix 1 Audit methods

A. Audit design

This audit seeks to provide answers to the following two questions:

- What are the nominal and actual staffing levels, and what is the level of staff availability, at all levels of the police force?
- What role does information on staffing levels and staff availability play in managing the use made of staff resources at all levels of the police force?

The phrase ‘at all levels of the police force’ is taken to refer to the national management level, the regional units, the districts and the local teams.

The audit involved analysing data supplied by the police for the period from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019. We used this data analysis to answer the first audit question (i.e. what are the nominal and actual staffing levels, and what is the level of staff availability, at all levels of the police force?).

The data collected by the police contains figures on aspects including nominal and actual staffing levels, the level of availability, sickness absence (both short-term and long-term) and various types of leave. We did not examine the accuracy of the underlying data.

Section B of this appendix contains a detailed description of the specific data used by our audit team and the indicators used in this connection.

We interviewed a total of 91 people at various levels of the police force, i.e. representatives of the national police management, the regional units and the local teams. We also asked the entities in question to provide us with policy documents on the issue of staff availability. We found that the figures on staff availability did not take account of deployability, even though this is a relevant issue that helps to build up a picture of the degree to which police personnel are both available for duty and properly qualified to carry out the duties in question.

Our interviews with national police managers, regional units and local teams made use of ‘topic lists’ with a number of questions on each topic on the list. There were slight differences between the questions we asked, depending on the interviewee’s job. The following were recurring items on the topic lists:

What do you understand the term ‘availability’ to mean? Do staff at the different levels use the same definition? Have you encountered any practical problems with nominal and actual





staffing levels and with the level of staff availability? We also questioned all our interviewees about the way in which staff availability is managed within the police force, and how the issue is dealt with in tripartite consultations with local mayors and public prosecutors.

In analysing the interviews and the documents supplied to us, we made use of a qualitative analytical tool called *Atlas.ti*. We used this tool to analyse interview reports and documents. We sought to establish which particular issues were recurring topics of discussion at various organisational levels, and what similarities and differences there were among the levels and the regional units.

At a national level, we interviewed 11 representatives of the national police management. The interviewees included staff of the HRM division, the Capacity Management department (which is part of the HRM division) and the Finance and Control division.

We also interviewed staff and requested documents at two *regional units* that we used as case studies for this audit, i.e. the Limburg regional unit (with 18 respondents) and the Central Netherlands regional unit (with 25 respondents). We talked to the regional unit managers, the district managers and the team managers of six local teams in each regional unit. Here too, we also interviewed staff from the Capacity Management and Planning department and the Control department.

The two regional units we visited were selected on the grounds of variation: not only was the Central Netherlands regional unit understaffed at the time of the audit, its territory also encompassed a number of relatively large towns (including Utrecht). The Limburg regional unit, on the other hand, is a unit with a more rural territory that was overstaffed at the time of the audit.

In selecting these two regional unit on the grounds of the differences between them, we wanted to build up a good picture of the various capacity problems confronting the police. Our focus in each regional unit lay on the unit management and on a (random) selection of six local teams in each unit: see Figures 18 and 19 below.





Central Netherlands

Districts and local teams

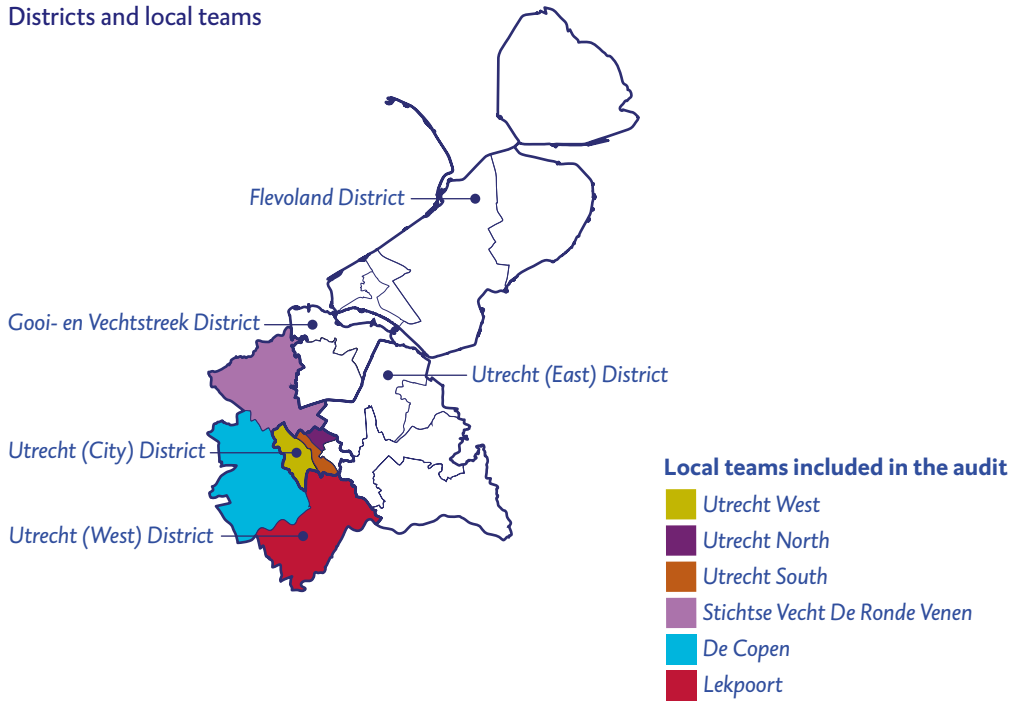


Figure 19 Geographical division of the Central Netherlands regional unit and the six local teams selected for the audit

Limburg

Districts and local teams

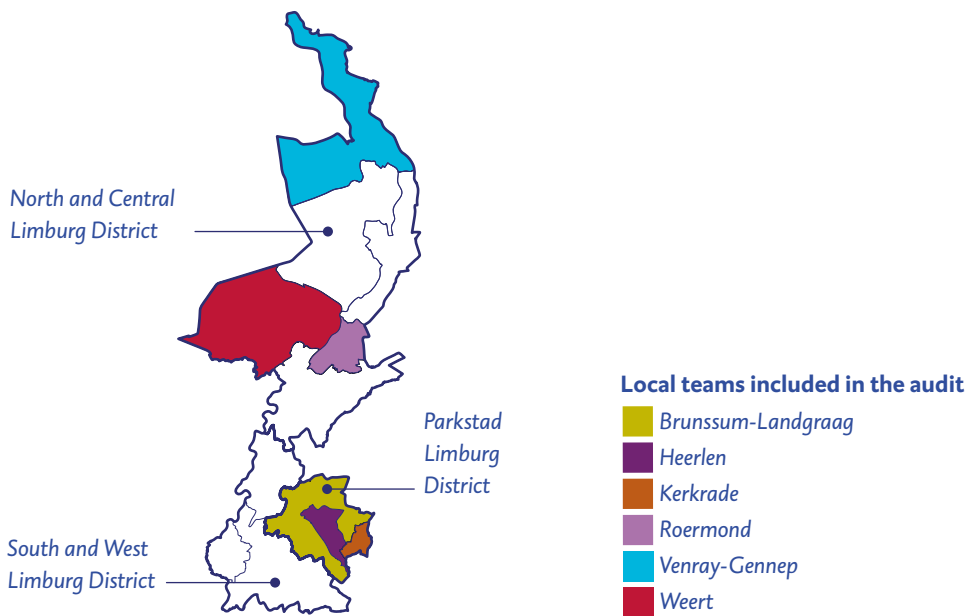


Figure 20 Geographical division of the Limburg regional unit and the six local teams selected for the audit





During the preliminary stage of the audit, and before conducting our interviews at the Central Netherlands and Limburg regional units, we performed a pilot audit at the Rotterdam and Eastern Netherlands regional units. We spoke to a total of 11 members of staff at the same levels as was later the case at the Central Netherlands and Limburg regional units (see above).

Finally, we spoke 23 police officers from six *local teams* across the country. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain the effects of high and low levels of staff availability on day-to-day police operations. We also wanted to incorporate police officers' practical experiences in the audit findings.

The local teams in question were located in various districts throughout the country. Again, they were selected on the strength of variation in staffing and availability levels (see Table 1). We asked the officers in question about problems they encountered in relation to availability and deployability, using reply cards so that they could indicate their own perceived order of importance.

Table 1 Selection of local teams

Staff	High level of staff availability	Average level of staff availability	Low level of staff availability
Overstaffed	Local team 1		Local team 2
Adequate staffing level		Local team 5 and 6	
Onderbezetting	Local team 3		Local team 4

B. Quantitative analyses

This section describes in more detail how we approached the quantitative analysis of nominal and actual staffing levels and the level of staff availability in the police force during the period from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019. We discuss the data we received from the police, how we combined this data into new data sets and how we then analysed the resultant data sets. Finally, we discuss the limitations in interpreting the analyses.

Audit data

We asked the police to supply us with data on nominal and actual staffing levels, and levels of staff availability, for the entire police force. The data in question was supplied to us in the form of three separate files or data sets. Basically, these files contained figures on the nominal and actual staffing levels, the levels of staff availability and the underlying types of leave and absenteeism that account for the difference between the actual staffing level and the level of staff availability. They also contained relevant information on the number of





exemptions from night shifts in each local team. This information came from a police ‘data warehouse’ (known as BVI-BV), combining data from two databases, the BVCM database (a roster system) and the Beaufort database (an HRM database). This means that the figures in question are broadly the same data as are used to feed the Police Performance Dashboard.

In addition to containing information on nominal and actual staffing levels and the levels of staff availability, the files also contained information on leave and sickness absence for all individual members of staff. Table 2 lists the personal characteristics of police staff and the variables used for recording leave and sickness absence.

Table 2 *Characteristics of police staff and variables used for recording leave and sickness absence*

Charateristics of police staff	Variables used for recording leave and sickness absence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee number • Period of employment • Age • Organisational entity* • Job title • Exemption from night shifts (yes or no)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary leave (evenly divided over the year) • Partial retirement leave (evenly divided over the year) • Leave under the collective agreement (evenly divided over the year) • Unpaid leave (current status, from week to week) • Maternity leave (current status, from week to week) • Parental leave (current status, from week to week) • Leave under the life-course savings scheme (current status, from week to week) • Age-related leave (current status from week to week) • Sickness absence, less than six weeks (current status from week to week) • Sickness absence, more than six weeks (current status from week to week)

** Each organisational entity in the police force has its own organisational code. This code is used to link the data on individual members of staff to the various organisational entities.*

The files contained data from 13 different measurement moments, evenly distributed over the period from 13 July 2018 to 12 July 2019. Each measurement moment in the data set contained the averages for the four preceding weeks, converted into figures for a single week. One FTE is assumed to be equivalent to 36 hours. The four-week periods were chosen because the police use the same periods for internal planning purposes.

Alongside the data on staff capacity, the police also supplied us with the geographical locations of the local teams in question.





Cleaning up the audit data

We combined the data sets we received from the police to form new files that we used for analytical purposes. In doing so, we made a number of choices which are explained below.

The data sets on staffing levels and levels of staff availability contained information on individual members of staff, based on employee numbers. Certain employee numbers refer to a number of different periods of employment within the same period. To avoid double counts, we took only the most recent period of employment into account.

We also received data on the 'formal' and actual staffing level. The internal Police Performance Dashboard contains information on the formal staffing level (i.e. at the organisational entity with which a member of staff is under contract) and the actual workplace-related staffing level (i.e. at the organisational entity where the individual actually works). For the purpose of this audit, we only took account of the actual staffing level. We did this because we wanted to establish how many members of staff (measured in FTEs) are actually available in practice. This was also why we included temporary staff in our calculations. As a further point, in calculating the level of staff availability, the dashboard factors in public holidays and the extra 1% of contractual working hours added under the 2005-2006 collective agreement for the police. The same information was not available, however, in relation to the actual workplace-related staffing level. For this reason, we decided not to include this information from the dashboard in calculating the level of staff availability based on the actual workplace-related staffing level.

The data sets supplied by the police included a figure for the 'percentage availability' of each individual member of staff. We found, however, that not all these figures were correct (some of them even had negative values) and that they were not based on the actual workplace-related staffing level. For this reason, we decided to calculate the level of staff availability ourselves, as follows:

- The starting point was the actual workplace-related staffing level for each individual member of staff (measured in FTEs).
- In order to calculate the level of staff availability, we then deducted from this figure the various types of leave and sickness absence (i.e. ordinary leave, partial retirement leave, leave under the collective agreement, unpaid leave, maternity leave, parental leave, leave under the life-course savings scheme, age-related leave, sickness absence lasting less than six weeks and sickness absence lasting more than six weeks). This is the method used by the Police Performance Dashboard to calculate the level of staff availability.





- We occasionally found the level of staff availability to be negative. This is also a problem that affects the Police Performance Dashboard and is caused by distributing partial retirement leave, leave under the collective agreement and ordinary leave evenly over the entire year. These three types of leave are consistently deducted from staffing levels, even if a member of staff spends a whole week on sick leave or is absent on maternity leave. It is not possible to have a negative level of staff availability in practice, however.
- We tried to assess the level of availability as accurately as possible using the data available to us. We decided to record any negative availability as zero. The Police Performance Dashboard does not do this, however. We also recalculated every type of leave and absence on a proportionate basis in such cases, so that the staffing level less leave and absence also ended up as zero.

We also made a number of choices in cleaning up and analysing the individual data sets. These are described below.

- We received two data sets from the police, one with figures on staffing levels and one with data on availability. We combined these figures in order to calculate the percentage level of availability. During the period from July 2018 to July 2019, the police staff complement consisted of an average of 62,647 employee numbers. The data set on availability, on the other hand, contained data on an average of 55,950 employee numbers. In other words, there was no availability data on 6,697 employee numbers, the reason being that the data on staffing levels and staff availability came from two separate data sources. In order to calculate the percentage level of availability with a high degree of accuracy, we looked only at the 55,950 employee numbers from the data set on availability. We made an adjustment for the lack of availability data on 6,697 employee numbers by extrapolating the availability data on the 55,950 employee numbers in the availability data set to the 62,647 employee numbers in the staffing level data set.
- We included the following types of leave in our calculations: unpaid leave, leave under the collective agreement, maternity leave, parental leave, leave under the life-course savings scheme, age-related leave, partial retirement leave, sickness absence lasting less than six weeks and sickness absence lasting more than six weeks.

Aggregation map data

The map data we received from the police contained the coordinates of the various local teams in the form of shapefiles. By aggregating these coordinates at district and regional unit levels, we were able to map the police at both these levels.





The map of local teams we received from the police also included regions with water (such as the IJsselmeer lake) within their territory. We filtered out these sections of the map by projecting the map on a map of the Netherlands from which the stretches of water had been removed. The map of the Netherlands we used was supplied by Statistics Netherlands: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/nederland-regionaal/geografische-data/wijk-en-buurtkaart-2018>

Analyses

In performing our analysis, we sought to answer a number of questions about the police force as a whole, about the regional units and about the local teams. In order to arrive at an average for the period from 13 July 2018 to 12 July 2019, we calculated all the averages for 13 measurement moments. Using the data, we calculated the differences between the nominal and actual staffing levels and the levels of availability at the various levels, thus revealing the difference in composition between the actual staffing level and the level of staff availability.¹²

We combined the figures for the nominal and actual staffing levels and the levels of availability on a map of the Netherlands showing the situation at three different levels, i.e. for the regional units, the districts and the local teams. The first step was to calculate the ratios between the actual and nominal staffing levels and between staff availability and the nominal staffing level. We then used the local team data for both ratios to calculate the 33% and 66% quantiles, thus dividing the local team data into three equal groups. By combining the quantiles for the ratios between the actual and nominal staffing levels and between staff availability and the nominal staffing level, we divided the data for each of the levels into nine (3x3) groups. We then assigned a colour to each group on the map, enabling the reader to see at a glance whether a local team, district or regional unit was either overstaffed or understaffed and whether there was a high or low level of staff availability at the unit in question. The map also allows the reader to compare the three levels with each other in terms of actual and nominal staffing levels, and staff availability.

Round-table meeting

After we had completed the audit, we presented a report of findings to the Ministry of Justice and Security and invited officials at the Ministry to comment on it. In November 2019, after the final version of the audit report had been approved, we discussed the audit findings at a meeting with experts and representatives of the police and the Ministry of Justice and Security.



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Appendix 3 Notes

1. Factored into this figure is an average of 8% of time spent on training, which is regarded as constituting time during which officers are not available for duty. If no account is taken of time spent on training, the figure for staff availability in the basis teams ranges from 72.4% to 85.8%.
2. We performed an audit in 2017 of the number of offences reported to the police that stood a good chance of being investigated. We found that the likelihood of offences being followed up was higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2017a).
3. Adapted as compared with the version of the report presented to the Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner for comment. Change of amount from 5,7 to 5,78.
4. Caption adapted as compared with the version of the report presented to the Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner for comment.
5. Adapted as compared with the version of the report presented to the Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner for comment, 'qualitative part' was added.
6. Adapted as compared with the version of the report presented to the Minister of Justice and Security and the national police commissioner for comment, extra line was added to figure.
7. We should point out, however, that we use an average for 2018, whereas, in theory, the Police Performance Dashboard displays the current information only.
8. The nationwide model uses a different reference period, viz. September 2018. Our own percentages are based on the period from mid-July 2018 to mid-July 2019.
9. Although the term 'waterline' was conceived some time ago by the police, it does not figure in official policy documents. The term now favoured by the police is 'core staffing level'. See the box entitled 'Terminological confusion' in section 1.6.
10. This figure represents the actual staffing level, less the volume of absence due to leave, sickness and training (with the latter accounting for 8% of police time).
11. This figure is based on an assumption that staff spend an average of 8% of their time on training, during which they are not available for duty. If the time spent on training is not included in the calculation, the level of staff availability in the local teams ranges from 72.4% to 85.8%.
12. A number of factors (such as amount of time spent on training) are missing from the data set, despite their obvious impact on the availability of individual members of staff. Unfortunately, diachronic information on these factors is not available for individual employee numbers. We should point out that the figures for ordinary leave included in this data are evenly distributed over the year and are more or less the same for all employee numbers. This is most probably not an accurate reflection of reality, as it is reasonable to assume that more leave is taken during holiday periods and that not everyone takes exactly the same amount of leave every year. This was why we based our calculations on the averages for the 13 periods in question.



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