

Definition and measurement

Work accidents are sudden and sometimes violent events occurring during the execution of work leading to health damage or loss of life of the worker. International comparisons of work accidents are difficult, because of differences in record-keeping – e.g. statistics sometimes only record “compensated” accidents in workplaces of a sufficient size and exclude minor injuries – and in data-sources – insurance companies, social security registers, labour inspectorates, establishment censuses and special surveys. Comparability has however improved since the adoption of an ILO Resolution on “Statistics on occupational injuries resulting from accidents at work” in 1998, which sets out standards for data collection and presentation. The Resolution recommends capturing data on all work-related accidents causing an absence from work of at least one day (excluding the day of the event) during a given reference period (usually one year).

The figures shown here are compiled by Eurostat through a harmonized questionnaire covering EU-15 countries and Norway, extended to other OECD countries for which the data are available in *Laborsta*, an ILO database on labour statistics. The reporting of non-fatal injuries is limited to injuries causing absences from work of more than three days in European countries and Japan, of six or more days in Australia, and of one or more days in other countries; and in all countries it excludes absences causing lower working hours rather than an outright absence from the workplace. The frequency of fatal and non-fatal work accidents is expressed as the number of work accidents during 12 consecutive months per 100 000 workers. The severity of workplace injuries is measured by the number of workdays lost due to work accidents per 100 000 workers. Data for some countries may exclude accidents affecting the self-employed and employees in small firms. In some case, they refer to compensated rather than reported injuries, and express accidents relative to insured rather all workers.

Workplace accidents are the most visible manifestation of the hazards of paid work. Most work accidents are non-fatal. In 2003, fatal work-accidents were most frequent in Turkey, Korea and Mexico and least frequent in the United Kingdom and Sweden (Table CO4.1) and have declined since 1995 in all countries for which the data are available. Non-fatal accidents are more common, ranging in 2003 from 1 200 cases per 100 000 workers in the Netherlands to 6 500 cases in Spain, and also appear to have declined in all countries except Spain (Figure CO4.2). In the United States, this decline might have resulted from a tightening in insurance rules, which have increased employers' incentives to under-report minor accidents or to offer injured employees to work reduced hours: as a result, the total number of occupational injuries (6 200 cases per 100 000 workers in 2000) is more than three times higher than that of work accidents leading to days away from work shown in Table CO4.1, due to the importance of accidents leading only to restricted work activity (1 200) or without lost work days (3 200 cases; Ruser, 2002).

Both fatal and non-fatal work accidents are strongly concentrated in agriculture, certain manufacturing industries, construction and road transports. As workers in these sectors are predominantly adult men, workers aged 45 to 54 account for more than half of all fatal accidents (and workers aged 25 to 44 for more than half of non-fatal ones). In Europe, a 25% decline in fatal

accidents since 1995 has been accompanied by increasing concentration of work accidents among older workers. While sectoral shifts in employment account for part of the decline in work accidents, this decline has taken place in all sectors in the United States (at least for non-fatal accidents).

The average duration of absences from work due to work accidents was less than six days in 2001 but close to eight days in Spain. In the United States, the median number of workdays lost due to work accidents was six days per full-time worker. In all countries, the duration of these absences is particularly high in manufacturing as well as agriculture and construction.

Work accidents impose significant economic costs on workers, firms and communities. While difficult to quantify, estimates of these costs – combined with those of occupational illness – ranged between 0.4 to 4% of GDP in several European countries (EASHW, 1998). Reducing work accidents requires a work environment where employees have the appropriate skills and training to perform the tasks involved in their jobs, and where firms have incentives to avoid the occurrence of work accidents.

Status indicators: Sick-related absences from work (HE4).
Response indicators: Public social spending (EQ5), Health care expenditure (HE2).

CO4.1. Fatal work accidents are more frequent in Turkey, Korea and Mexico than in other OECD countries

Fatal and non-fatal accidents in 2003 per 100 000 workers, lost workdays per worker involved in 2001

	Work accidents			Non-fatal work accidents by industry			
	Fatal	Non-fatal	Days lost per worker involved	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Construction	Transport
<i>Compensated injuries</i>							
Australia	2.0	1 230	6.0	2 561	2 070	2 201	2 056
Finland	2.7	2 847	5.7	5 226	3 339	5 908	3 534
Germany	3.5	3 674	4.3	12 160	3 432	7 029	3 702
Luxembourg	3.6	5 033	..	9 795	4 887	10 812	4 415
Belgium	3.9	3 456	5.7	5 387	3 572	6 398	3 898
Greece	3.9	2 090	..	1 265	3 226	4 519	1 820
New Zealand	5.2	1 605	..	..	..	..	..
France	5.4	4 689	5.9	4 778	4 232	10 066	6 123
Canada	6.1	2 227	5.7	2 212	3 914	3 428	2 650
Korea (2001)	15.5	..	..	..	..	..	..
<i>Reported injuries</i>							
United Kingdom	1.0	1 614	..	2 139	1 519	2 493	1 868
Sweden	1.6	1 252	5.3	1 355	1 717	2 090	1 583
Netherlands	1.8	1 188	..	..	..	..	..
Denmark	2.4	2 443	..	1 284	4 141	3 773	2 991
Japan	3.1	233	..	1 028	287	584	440
Norway	3.1	3 325	..	3 161	5 563	5 835	4 448
Hungary	3.4	656	..	748	1 235	469	960
Ireland	3.9	1 262	..	..	..	..	..
Czech Republic	4.5	1 872	6.4	3 947	3 256	3 429	1 966
Slovak Republic	4.7	801	5.1	2 720	1 601	2 049	882
Poland	4.9	..	5.0	..	..	..	..
Italy	5.6	3 267	..	..	..	..	..
Spain	6.0	6 520	7.7	2 401	8 820	13 651	6 526
Austria	6.6	2 629	..	..	..	..	..
United States	8.0	1 626	6.0	..	..	..	..
Portugal	8.4	4 054	..	880	5 773	6 851	3 624
Mexico	12.0	2 968	..	..	..	..	..
Turkey (2001)	20.6	..	..	..	..	..	..

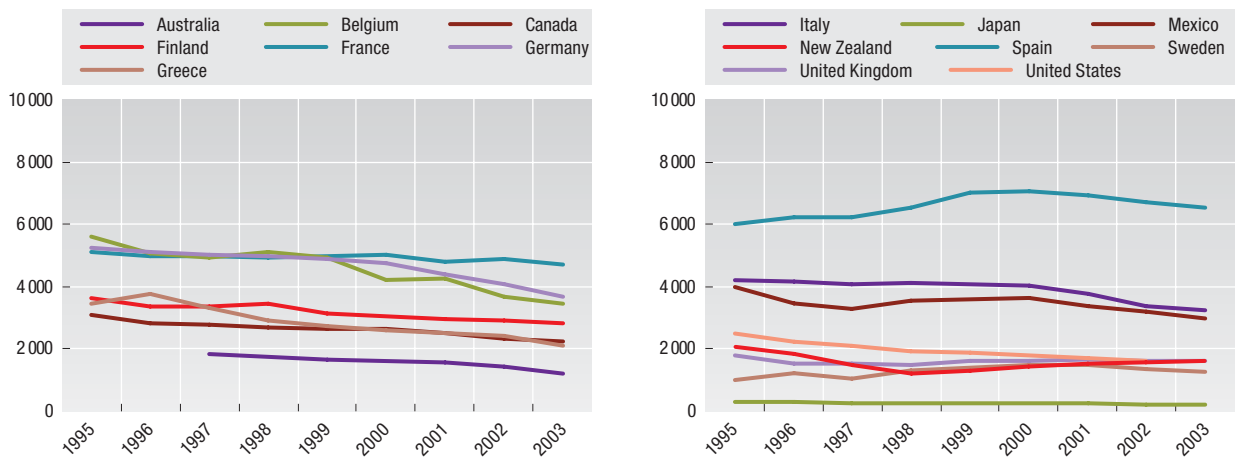
.. : not available.

Note: Countries in each panel are ranked in increasing order of fatal accidents. Data on the frequencies of fatal and non-fatal injuries for EU-15 and Norway are weighted based on the EU-15 employment structure (by industry).

Source: ILO Laborsta database; Eurostat New Cronos database; and BLS website on fatal work accidents and occupational injuries (www.bls.gov/iif/).

CO4.2. Non-fatal work accidents are declining in most countries

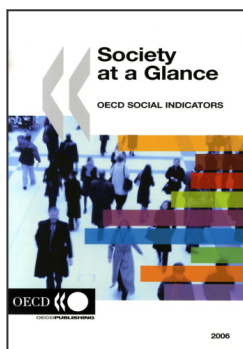
Work-related non-fatal accidents per 100 000 workers, 1995 to 2003



Source: ILO Laborsta database; Eurostat New Cronos Database.

StatLink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/552432835786>

Further reading ■ European Agency for Safety and Health at Work – EASHW (1998), *Economic Impact of Occupational Safety and Health in Member States of the European Union*, Bilbao. ■ Ruser, J. (2002), *Measuring Workplace Safety and Health: general considerations and the US case*, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, UNECE-Eurostat-ILO seminar on Measurement of the quality of employment, Geneva, May.



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