



BRIEFING PAPER

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Health and Safety Statistics

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1. Summary

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publishes statistics on workplace health and safety in Great Britain.

In 2019/20:

- 111 workers were fatally injured at work

This is a [provisional figure](#) released by HSE on 1 July 2020¹. It is the lowest annual number of workplace deaths on record, and a fall of 38 from 2018/19. HSE notes that this decrease was accentuated by the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on the economy in the final two months of the year, when many workers were not at work. Fatal injury statistics do not include deaths from occupational diseases, including COVID-19.

At the time of writing 2018/19 is the most recent year we have data for non-fatal injuries and illness caused by work. HSE will publish these statistics for 2019/20 in November 2020.

In 2018/19 there were:

- 69,208 non-fatal injuries to employees reported by employers
- 581,000 non-fatal injuries to workers according to self-reported estimates
- 1.4 million working people suffering from a work-related illness
- Stress, depression or anxiety is the most common type of work-related illness, accounting for 44% of work-related ill health and 54% of working days lost in 2018/19, with women particularly highly affected by this ill health type
- 28.2 million working days lost as a result of work-related ill health or injury

Occupation is the most important risk factor in relation to both work-related ill health and workplace injuries.

Sectors with the highest rates of fatal injury are construction, agriculture, waste disposal and recycling, and offshore fishing.

Sectors with the highest rates of non-fatal injury are agriculture, forestry and fishing and construction.

Sectors with the highest ill health rates are public administration and defence, human health and social work, and education.

In 2017/18, injuries and new cases of ill health in workers resulting from current working conditions cost society an estimated £15 billion.

The UK has a lower rate of fatal accidents at work than most other European countries.

¹ [Fatal injuries in Great Britain 2019/20](#), HSE, 1 July 2020

2. Definition and background

The first provision made in Britain to monitor health and safety at work was Her Majesty's Factory Inspectorate, appointed in the [Factory Act 1833](#). This body was responsible for the investigation of deaths, injuries and ill health through work until the 1970s.

The [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#) established the Health and Safety Commission to research, inform, advise and regulate industry.

The Health and Safety Executive was formed the following year, in 1975, to enforce health and safety law, a duty shared with Local Authorities.

In 2008 the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive merged to form one organisation: the [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE). A timeline of the history of the Health and Safety Executive and its predecessors can be found [here](#).

The Health and Safety Executive publishes statistics from a number of sources², notably the [Labour Force Survey](#) and Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 ([RIDDOR](#)), which collect detailed accounts of workplace accidents and occupational illness.

Offshore industries are particularly dangerous work environments and have their own dedicated sources of health and safety statistics.

The [Offshore Safety Directive Regulator](#) is responsible for implementing the requirements of the EU Directive on the safety of offshore oil and gas operation.

The [Marine Accident Investigation Branch](#), part of the Department for Transport, compiles figures on accidents involving fishing vessels and fishermen.

² See <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/sources.htm> for a fuller description of data sources used by HSE

3. Injuries

Fatal injuries

In 2019/20:

- 111 workers were fatally injured at work, a rate of 0.34 fatalities per 100,000 workers
- This is the lowest annual number on record. HSE notes that “COVID-19 has had some impact on reducing numbers”
- The rate of fatal injury for employees was 0.28 per 100,000 workers, while that for the self-employed was 0.64, though this varied by industry.³⁴

The following HSE chart shows the rate of fatal injuries to workers (both employed and self-employed) in Great Britain since 1981.



Since the 1980s there has been a steady fall in the rate of fatal injuries, though this has broadly flattened in recent years. In 1996/7 there were a total of 287⁵ fatalities at work; in 2019/20 there were 111⁶.

- Fatal injuries are predominately to male workers. In 2019/20, 108 (97%) of all worker fatalities were to male workers, a similar proportion to earlier years

³ The difference in rates of fatal injury between employees and self-employed workers does not infer causality, which will be impacted by other factors such as age and sector.

⁴ HSE, [Workplace fatal injuries in Great Britain 2020](#), 1 July 2020

⁵ HSE, [Reported fatal and non-fatal injuries in Great Britain from 1974](#), Source RIDDOR

⁶ HSE, [Workplace fatal injuries in Great Britain 2020](#), 1 July 2020

- 27% of fatal injuries in 2019/20 were to workers aged 60 and over, even though such workers made up only around 10% of the workforce.
- While COVID-19 has had some impact on reducing numbers in 2019.20, in statistical terms the number of fatalities has remained broadly level in recent years. The fall seen in the current year, while striking, may not reflect any major shift in the inherent dangerousness of workplaces.⁷

The HSE looks at longer-term trends in work-related ill health and workplace injury in [Historical picture statistics in Great Britain, 2019](#). It observes how over the course of the twentieth century deaths at work to employees fell from 4,400 to around 200, further reducing since the year 2000 to a total of 106 in 2018/19 (plus 41 self-employed workers). It comments:

This reduction is in part due to changes in the industry composition over the period (for example a shift away from mining, manufacturing and other heavy industry to lower risk service industries). A comparison of fatal injury numbers between 1974 (when the Health and Safety at Work Act was introduced) and 2018/19, adjusting to allow for the difference in industry coverage of the reporting requirements between these years, suggests that fatal injury numbers to employees have fallen by around 84% over this period.

Non-fatal injuries

At the time of writing 2018/19 is the most recent year we have data for. Statistics for 2019/20 will be published in November 2020.

In 2018/19 there were:

- 581,000 non-fatal injuries to workers according to self-reported estimates
- 69,208 non-fatal injuries to employees reported by employers, a rate of 254 per 100,000 employees
- Of these injuries, the most common kinds of accident were caused by slips and trips (29%), handling, lifting or carrying (20%), and being struck by moving objects (10%)

⁷⁷⁷ The difference in rates of fatal injury between employees and self-employed workers does not infer causality, which will be impacted by other factors such as age and sector.

4. Illness

At the time of writing 2018/19 is the most recent year we have data for. Statistics for 2019/20 will be published in November 2020.

In 2018/19:

- 1.4 million workers were suffering from an illness they believed was caused or made worse by their current or past work
- 497,000 of these were new conditions which started during 2018/19
- Around one third of the new work-related conditions were musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) while over 40% arose from stress, depression or anxiety, which has shown signs of increasing in recent years.
- Stress, depression and anxiety is the most common type of work-related illness, accounting for 44% of work-related ill health and 54% of working days lost in 2018/19
- Women are particularly highly affected by this ill health type and the occupations and industries reporting the highest rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety are in the health and public sectors of the economy.⁸

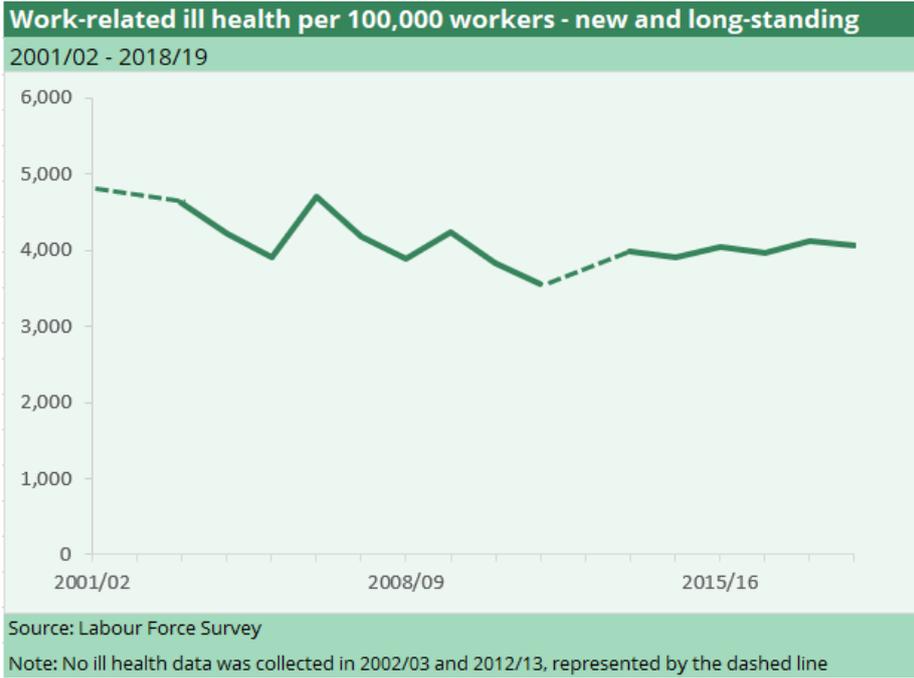
Rates of total cases and new cases of self-reported work-related illness showed a general downward trend from 2001/02 to around 2011/12, since when the rate has been broadly flat.⁹

The rate for musculoskeletal disorders continues a long-term downward trend, while the rate for stress, depression or anxiety, while broadly flat for more than a decade, has shown signs of increasing in recent years. Industries with higher than average rates of stress, depression or anxiety are education, health and social work, and public administration and defence.¹⁰ This chart shows the estimated rate of self-reported work-related illness, either new or long standing:

⁸ HSE, [Work-related stress depression or anxiety statistics in Great Britain](#), 2019 "In the three year period 2015/16-2017/18 the average prevalence rate for work-related stress, depression or anxiety for males was 1,370 cases and 1,950 cases for females per 100,000 workers." p 7

⁹ HSE, [Work-related ill health and occupational disease in Great Britain](#), 2019

¹⁰ HSE, [Health and Safety Summary Statistics 2019](#), 2019



5. Fatal diseases

There are around 12,000 deaths each year from occupational lung disease and cancer estimated to have been caused by past exposure to chemicals and dust at work. More than half of these deaths were caused by past exposure to asbestos.

Most of these diseases take many years to develop and so current deaths are the result of past workplace conditions.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), caused by dust, gases, vapours and fumes, is estimated to be the single largest cause of deaths due to work-related diseases, at around 4,000 per year.

In 2017, 2,526 people died from mesothelioma, a type of cancer associated with exposure to asbestos.

Other causes of occupational cancer are exposure to silica, diesel engine exhaust, and mineral oils.

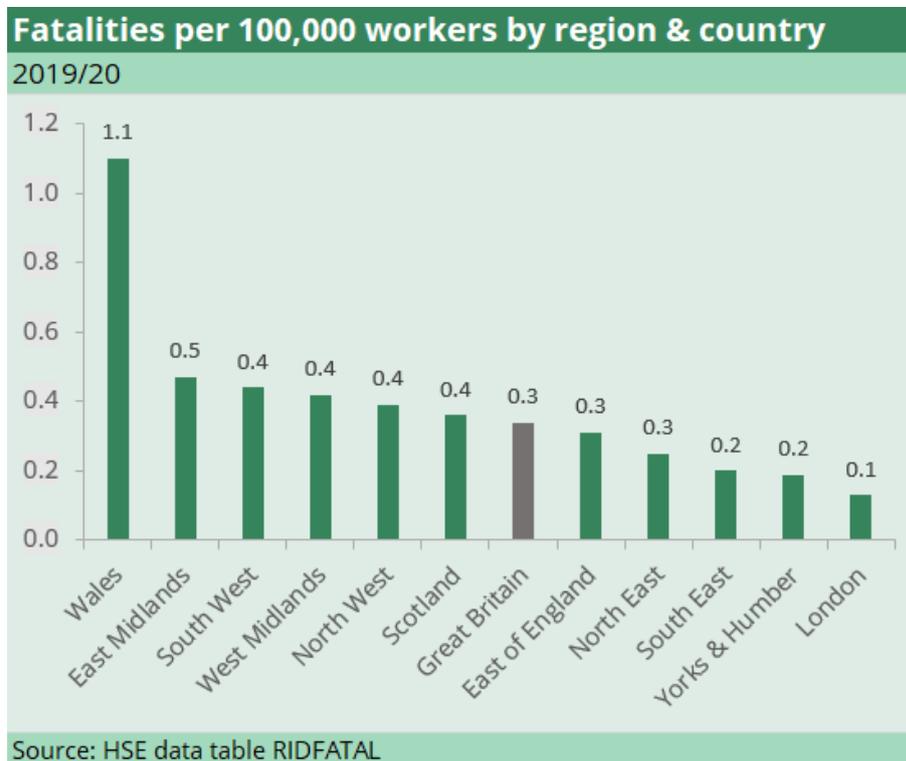
There were 4,255 new Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) cases in 2018, of which 92% were diseases associated with past asbestos exposure. ¹¹

¹¹ HSE, [Occupational Lung Disease in Great Britain](#), 2019, p 7

6. Region and country

The main driver of differences in health and safety risk is not the geographic area in which someone works. Any apparent difference between regions and countries is likely to be strongly affected by the industry mix in the economy of those regions and countries. The number of fatalities in some regions is relatively small, hence susceptible to considerable variation, and accidents involving multiple fatalities can also affect annual totals.

In 2019/20 Wales had the highest rate of workplace fatalities in Great Britain. It was twice that of the next highest, the East Midlands, and over three times the national average.¹²



Scotland and Wales have proportionally fewer workers in low-risk industries compared with England, and in London and the South East there is a higher proportion of workers in low-risk industries than across the rest of the country.

Wales recorded the highest number of workplace fatalities – 16 - in addition to the highest rate in 2019/20, followed by the North West with 14. The lowest numbers were recorded in the North East (3) and Yorkshire and the Humber (5).

¹² HSE, [Countries and regions](#), 2018/19 HSE, [Workplace fatal injuries in Great Britain 2020](#), 1 July 2020

Fatalities at work by region & country

2019/20

	Fatalities	Rate (per 100,000 workers)
Wales	16	1.1
East Midlands	11	0.5
South West	13	0.4
West Midlands	12	0.4
North West	14	0.4
Scotland	10	0.4
East of England	9	0.3
North East	3	0.3
South East	9	0.2
Yorks & Humber	5	0.2
London	7	0.1
Region not known	2	-
Great Britain	111	0.3

Source: HSE data table RIDFATAL

In 2018/19, the most recent year's data we have for non-fatal injuries, workers in the Midlands and Wales reported more non-fatal injuries than the national average. London and the South of England reported fewer than the national average.

Non-fatal injuries at work by region & country

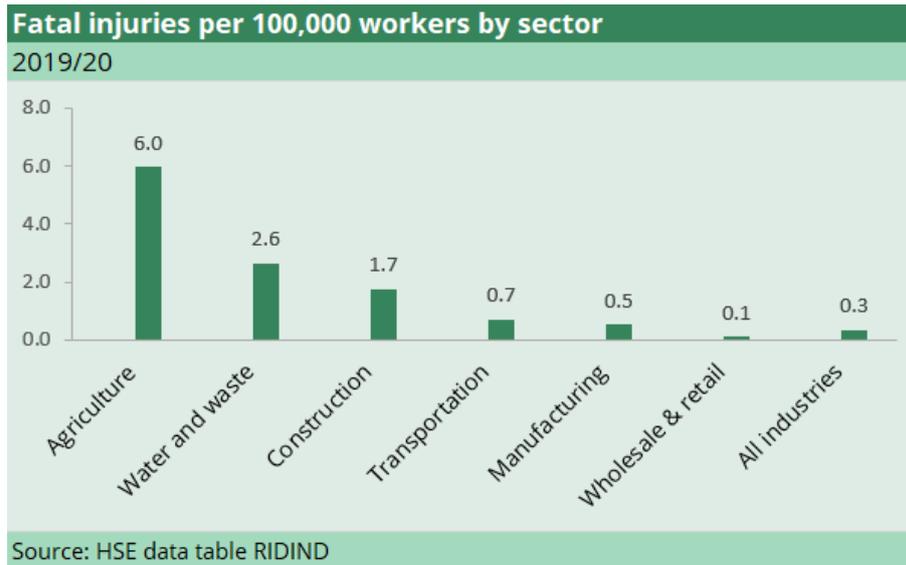
2018/19

	Non-fatal injuries	Rate (per 100,000 employees)
Wales	3,844	313
East Midlands	5,669	290
West Midlands	6,701	279
Yorks & Humber	6,241	276
North East	2,834	272
North West	8,246	271
Scotland	6,324	270
East of England	6,315	264
South West	5,833	246
South East	8,029	219
London	8,271	189
Great Britain	69,208	254

Source: HSE data table RIDNONFATAL

7. Sector

In terms of fatal accidents per 100,000 workers, the most dangerous sectors to work in are agriculture, and water and waste, particularly the waste and recycling division of that sector. In terms of the number of fatalities, agriculture and the construction sector are the most dangerous industries.¹³



- In 2019/20 there were 20 fatalities in agriculture. This equates to a rate of 6.0 per 100,000, nearly three times the rate for water and waste
- Construction is one of the few industry sectors which saw an increase in the number of fatal injuries to workers in 2019/20, with the number of deaths in 2019/20 (40) above the low of 31 seen in the previous year. However, annual numbers have fluctuated in recent years. Over the last five years, the number of deaths has ranged between 31 and 47, with a 5-year average of 37 deaths per year.
- Industry sectors with higher ill health rates are education, human health and social work activities, and public administration and defence. Women suffer higher rates of stress, depression and anxiety.¹⁴

¹³ HSE, [Workplace fatal injuries in Great Britain 2020](#), 2020

¹⁴ HSE, [Work-related ill health and occupational disease in Great Britain](#), 2019

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Fatalities at work by sector		
<i>2019/20</i>		
	<u>Fatalities</u>	<u>Rate</u>
Construction	40	1.7
Agriculture	20	6.0
Manufacturing	15	0.5
Transportation	11	0.7
Wholesale & retail	6	0.1
Water and waste	6	2.6
All industries	111	0.3

Source: HSE data table RIDIND
Rate is per 100,000 workers
Workers = employees and self-employed

8. Offshore industries

The two major offshore industries are fishing and energy supply. These are particularly dangerous work environments and have their own dedicated sources of health and safety statistics.

Oil and gas

In July 2015, HSE and the Department of Energy and Climate Change created the [Offshore Safety Directive Regulator](#) which is responsible for implementing the requirements of the EU Directive on the safety of offshore oil and gas operations.

In 2018:

- There were no fatalities. Since 2008 there have been a total of six fatalities.
- There were 19 specified injuries, a rate of 66 per 100,000 workers. Numbers and rates have fluctuated in previous years.¹⁵

Fishing

Figures on accidents involving fishing vessels and fishermen are compiled by the [Marine Accident Investigation Branch](#), part of the Department for Transport.¹⁶

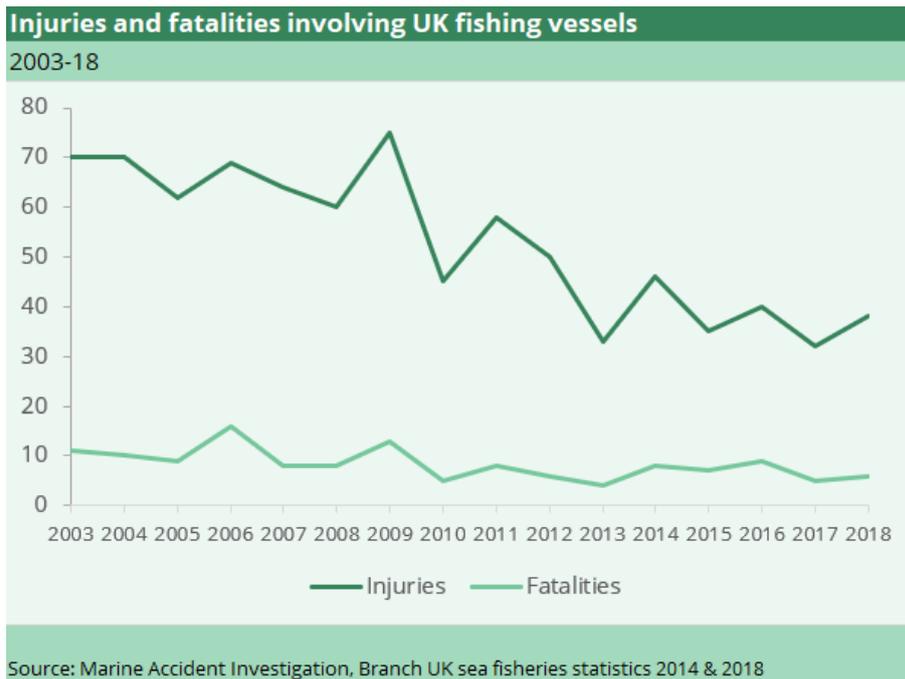
In 2018:

- There were 6 fatalities on fishing vessels, one more than 2017 and two more than the lowest of the decade (4 in 2013).
- There were 38 injuries on UK fishing vessels, following the lowest of the decade, 32, in 2017.

There were an estimated 11,961 fishermen in 2018, down 5 per cent since 2008.

¹⁵ HSE, [Offshore Statistics & Regulatory Activity Report 2018](#), August 2019

¹⁶ Marine Management Organisation, [UK Sea Fisheries Annual Statistics 2018](#), 2019



Over recent years, the number of fatalities and injuries in the offshore fishing industry has declined, although the profile has not been smooth.

Number of accidents and fatalities involving UK fishing vessels		
	Fatalities	Injuries
2003	11	70
2004	10	70
2005	9	62
2006	16	69
2007	8	64
2008	8	60
2009	13	75
2010	5	45
2011	8	58
2012	6	50
2013	4	33
2014	8	46
2015	7	35
2016	9	40
2017	5	32
2018	6	38

Source: Marine Accident Investigation
Branch UK sea fisheries statistics 2014 & 2018

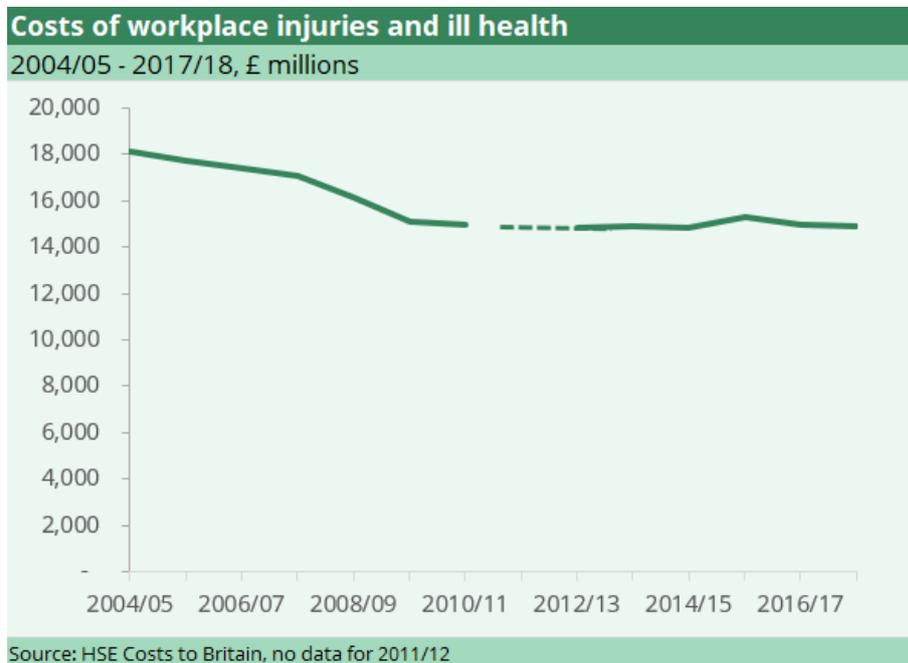
9. Cost of injuries and ill health at work

Total costs to society in Great Britain of workplace self-reported injuries and ill health in 2017/18 was **£15.0 billion**¹⁷

- New cases of workplace illness cost £9.8 billion
- Workplace injury (including fatalities) cost £5.2 billion

The majority of the cost fell on individuals, while the rest was carried by employers and government/taxpayers.

Total costs showed a downward trend between 2004/05 and 2009/10. This fall was driven by a reduction in the number of workplace injuries. Since then, the annual cost has been broadly level.



In terms of working days lost:

Working days lost per worker due to self-reported work-related illness or injury showed a generally downward trend but has been broadly flat in recent years

- Time taken off work due to a case of work-related ill health (17 days) is on average greater than the time taken off due to a workplace injury (8 days)

¹⁷ HSE, [Health and safety at work summary statistics for Great Britain 2019](#), p8, 2019

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- An estimated 16,000 workers withdraw permanently from the labour market annually as a result of a workplace injury or work-related ill health ¹⁸
- New cases of work-related ill health in 2017/18 saw 244,000 with 7 or more days off work and 275,000 with up to 6 days off work
- Between 2004/05 and 2009/10 the estimated total cost fell by 17% (from £18.1 billion in 2004/05 to £15.1 billion in 2009/10). The annual cost has since been broadly level (£15.0 billion in 2017/18) ¹⁹

¹⁸ [Costs to Britain of workplace fatalities and self-reported injuries and ill health, 2017/18](#), HSE, 2019, p12

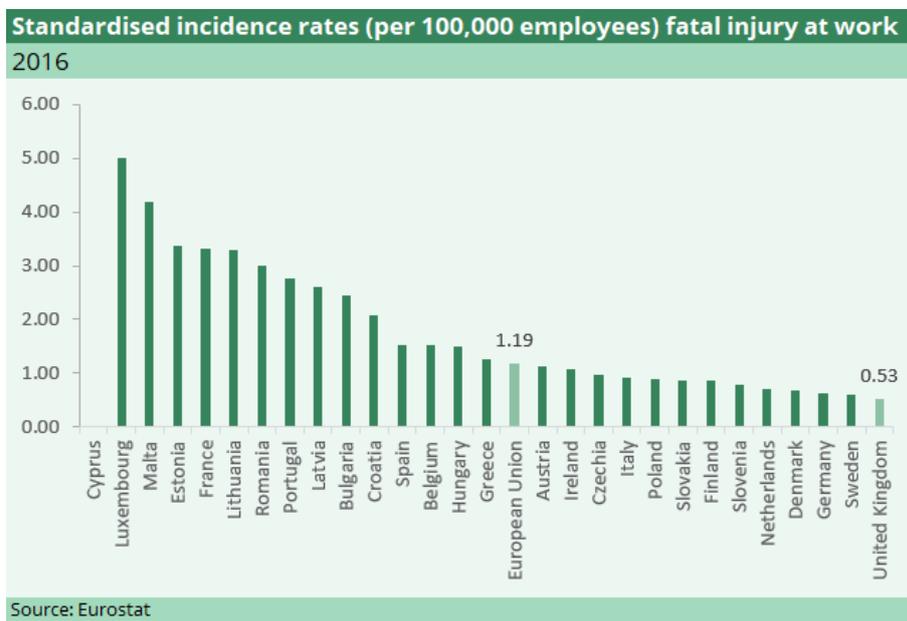
¹⁹ [Costs to Britain of workplace fatalities and self-reported injuries and ill health, 2017/18](#), HSE, 2019, p15

10. International comparisons

Health and safety systems in other countries differ in recording, reporting and enforcement, but Eurostat publishes nations' data in as standardised a form as possible, enabling comparison across Europe.²⁰

The UK consistently has one of the lowest rates of fatal injury across Europe.

In 2016 the standardised rate was 0.53 per 100,000 employees, which compares favourably with the 2016 EU-28 average of 1.19 per 100,000 employees.



²⁰ HSE, [European Comparisons](#), 2019, Data table [EU Comp 1](#)

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