



EUROPEAN ACCIDENTS AT WORK STATISTICS COVID-19 CASES WITH OCCUPATIONAL ORIGIN

1. ISSUE DESCRIPTION

Eurostat produces annual statistics on accidents at work - European Statistics on Accidents at Work (ESAW) data collection¹. Data for the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, reference year 2020, have been transmitted (the regulatory deadline being 30 June 2022) and are disseminated. Eurostat provided methodological guidance on statistical processing² in order to facilitate the collection of COVID-19 cases with occupational origin by reporting countries.

National practices are different, nonetheless in all EU Member States and in Switzerland and Norway it has been decided that COVID-19 could be related to an event in the workplace and received a recognition of occupational origin. In practice, for statistical purposes, occupational COVID-19 could be recorded as an accident at work (ESAW data collection), as an occupational disease (European Occupational Diseases Statistics³-EODS data collection) or both following the national rules in place.

In November 2020, Eurostat launched a methodological survey with the purpose of stock taking of national practices for recognising COVID-19 as having an occupational origin. Based on the replies received in response to the methodological survey, Eurostat produced a statistical report⁴. The report summarizes the existing situation on occupational COVID-19, providing information on national practices in place concerning the recognition of such cases. The report shows that national practices are different when it comes to the recognition in one of the two categories (accident at work or occupational disease), the economic sectors and the occupations concerned or the national criteria for recognition.

These diverse practices influence the COVID-19 related data comparability and have a methodological impact. In addition, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic many employers, where feasible, proposed teleworking as main work method for their employees or the reduction of work activities in order to limit the infection spread. This action affected the sectoral coverage of the potential population of workers that would be exposed, under normal circumstances, to the risk of being affected by accidents at work. Eurostat flagged all the accidents at work related data for the reference year 2020 as break in series. The present note summarises several reasons for this choice.

¹Under Regulation (EC) No 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/1338/2021-01-01>) and Commission Regulation 349/2011 as regards statistics on accidents at work (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/349/oj>)

²Methodological note available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/metadata/covid-19-support-for-statisticians>

³European Occupational Diseases Statistics – experimental statistics

⁴Possibility of recognising COVID-19 as being of occupational origin at national level in EU and EFTA countries <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/13464590/KS-FT-21-005-EN-N.pdf/d960b3ee-7308-4fe7-125c-f852dd02a7c7?t=1632742856466>

1.1. Methodological differences between the national practices, including legislative developments, for the recognition of COVID-19 as being of occupational origin and the speed of their adoption

1.1.1. Occupational COVID-19 and recognition

In 2020, national measures were established, including legislative developments that were required in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the purpose of protecting the workers against this new identified occupational risk caused by exposure to COVID-19 at workplace. The speed of adoption of these measures varies across countries; this plays also potentially a role when it comes to the statistics recorded on accidents at work.

The legislative changes affected the statistical definition of an accident at work by adding into it a new category – COVID-19 of occupational origin – that was for the first time introduced in 2020. These different practices are listed as paragraphs 1.1.2 - 1.1.5 of the present document.

*1.1.2. Occupational COVID-19 could be recorded **only** in accidents at work statistics*

The statistical report produced by Eurostat shows that in three Member States – Italy, Spain and Slovenia – it is possible to recognise occupational COVID-19 only as accident at work. The recognition criteria are different depending on the country; the national recognition criteria are available in the statistical report produced by Eurostat⁵.

*1.1.3. Occupational COVID-19 could be recorded either in accidents at work **or** in occupational diseases statistics*

In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland and Latvia it is possible to record occupational COVID-19 either as accident at work or occupational disease, and different criteria apply. The relevant national criteria for recognition as accidents at work are available in the statistical report produced by Eurostat.

From the six countries listed above, only Denmark and Belgium reported accidents at work related to COVID-19 in the ESAW data for 2020. Belgium reported one case, while Denmark reported several. The other four countries mentioned did not report any cases; for these four countries this seems to be the effect of the recognition criteria, in place for accidents at work.

*1.1.4. Occupational COVID-19 could be recorded **only** in occupational diseases statistics*

In Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and Norway and Switzerland the occupational COVID-19 cases can be recognised and potentially included only in occupational diseases statistics, following national criteria. Therefore, these cases are out of scope of the ESAW data collection and could be reported only in the EODS data collection.

⁵Possibility of recognising COVID-19 as being of occupational origin at national level in EU and EFTA countries
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/13464590/KS-FT-21-005-EN-N.pdf/d960b3ee-7308-4fe7-125c-f852dd02a7c7?t=1632742856466>

1.1.5. Occupational COVID-19 could be recorded with occupational origin, unspecified if in accidents at work or occupational diseases statistics

Ireland and Greece did mention that the occupational COVID-19 cases could be recorded without specifying in which data collection: accident at work (ESAW) or occupational disease (EODS). The analysis of national data for Ireland and Greece submitted for ESAW data collection, reference year 2020, shows no case of COVID-19 as accident at work for these two countries.

1.2. The effect of protection measures against the COVID-19 pandemic itself impacting the coverage of accidents data by economic sector

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, preventive measures were put in place with the aim of limiting the spread of the Coronavirus and to combat the epidemic.

Amongst these, some working activities have been either completely stopped or restricted by many employers. In some cases, the employers have applied the method of working remotely or working from home. This had a direct impact on all economic sectors. For the economic sectors where the activity was stopped or reduced, the number of accidents decreased. Inactivity or reduced activity in certain sectors resulted in decreased number of workers, and therefore showed unusual decrease in reported accidents at work. On the opposite end, in certain sectors COVID-19 pandemic generated an increase in the activity, for example, Human Health Activities, Residential Care Activities or Social Work Activities without Accommodation. Therefore, the increased activity generated generally higher numbers of reported accidents at work, especially when the cases of COVID-19 of occupational origin were included according to the national practice and legislation.

Public services that deal with the administrations in charge of receiving notifications, reporting, investigations and recognition of accidents at work could have functioned with limited capacities.

The impact of all the actions described above, lead to a decrease in the reported number of accidents at work in the data collection for the reference year 2020 [compared to the previous reference year], for the majority of the ESAW reporting countries. In Italy, for example, the opposite happened and this affected not only the accidents trend but also the calculation of the incidence rates.

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