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Emerging risks and challenges to workers' safety and health

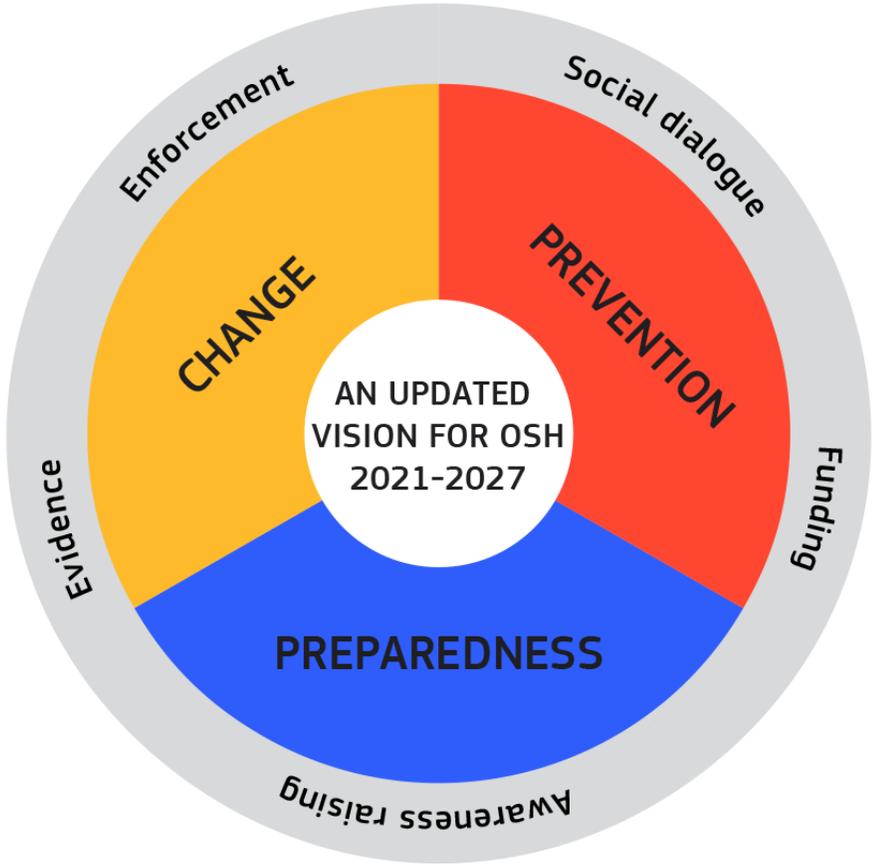
William Cockburn
Interim Executive Director
European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

1st December 2021

Anticipating and managing change

- Drivers of change
 - Green transition
 - Digitalisation
 - Ageing workforce
 - Alternative forms of employment
 - Shifting patterns of employment
 - New risks?

- Trends in OSH outcomes
 - Injuries
 - Ergonomics-related illnesses
 - PSR-related illnesses
 - Illnesses related to dangerous substances
 - Illnesses related to physical agents



Green transition

- Risks arising from climate change mitigation
 - Refitting of buildings
 - Recycling and waste treatment
 - New technology
- Risks arising from environmental effects of climate change
 - Geographical spread of diseases and vectors
 - Extremes of temperature
 - Natural disasters
 - Uncertainty and unpredictability



Digitalisation

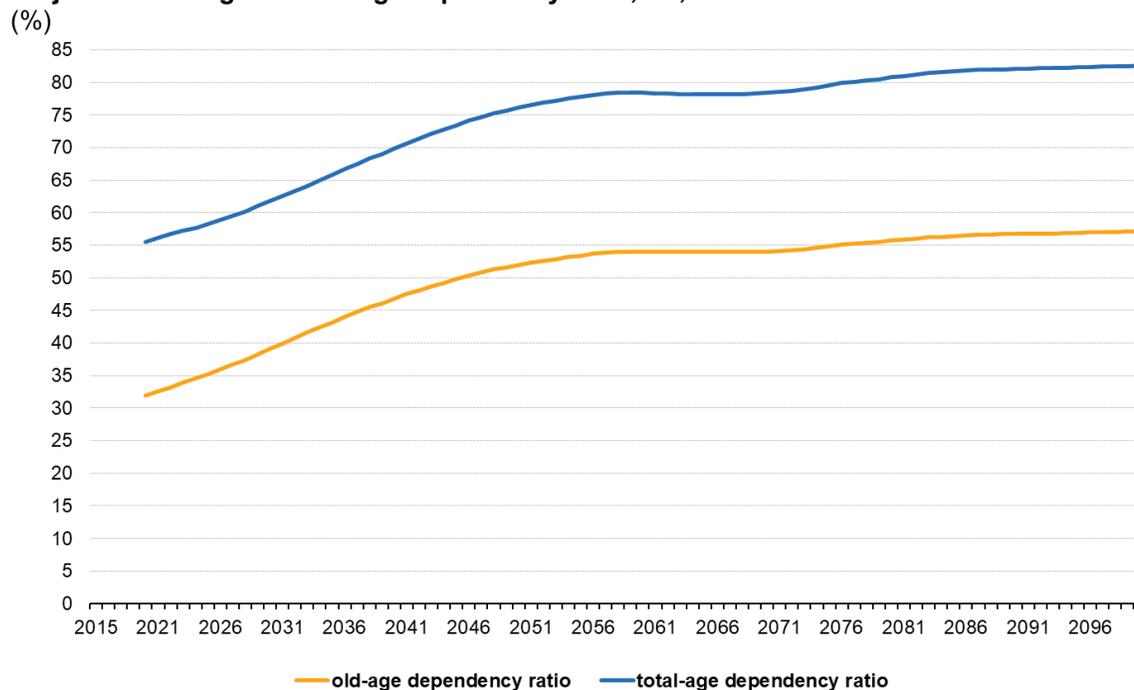
- Automation – advanced robotics and AI
 - Risk of injury – collision, burn, cut, noise, laser, etc.
 - Psychosocial risks – insecurity, privacy, isolation, intensity, etc.
- AI-based worker management
 - Psychosocial risks – intensification, mistrust
 - Effects on OSH management
- Digital platform work
 - Psychosocial risks – intensity and mistrust in online tasks
 - Ergonomic and injury risks – onsite manual or delivery tasks
 - Effects on OSH management
- Advanced OSH monitoring
 - Worker exposures
 - Physiological and psychological effects
 - Worker location / proximity warning
 - Context-relevant support in real time



Ageing workforce

- Longer working life
 - Increased likelihood of an accident
 - Increased likelihood of exposure
 - Increased exposure 'dose'
- Age-related vulnerabilities
 - Increased frailty
 - Underlying conditions and comorbidities
 - Diminishing capacities
 - Poorer recovery
- Caring responsibilities
 - Dependent older relatives or partner

Projected total-age and old-age dependency ratio, EU, 2020-2100



Note: 2020: provisional. 2021–2100: projections (EUROPOP2019).
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo_pjanind and proj_19ndbi)

Alternative forms of employment

- Temporary agency
- Seasonal work
- Self-employed
- Platform work and bogus self-employment
- Subcontracting chains
 - Poorer risk prevention
 - Many not covered by OSH legislation
 - Precarious employment
 - More likely to suffer other disadvantages



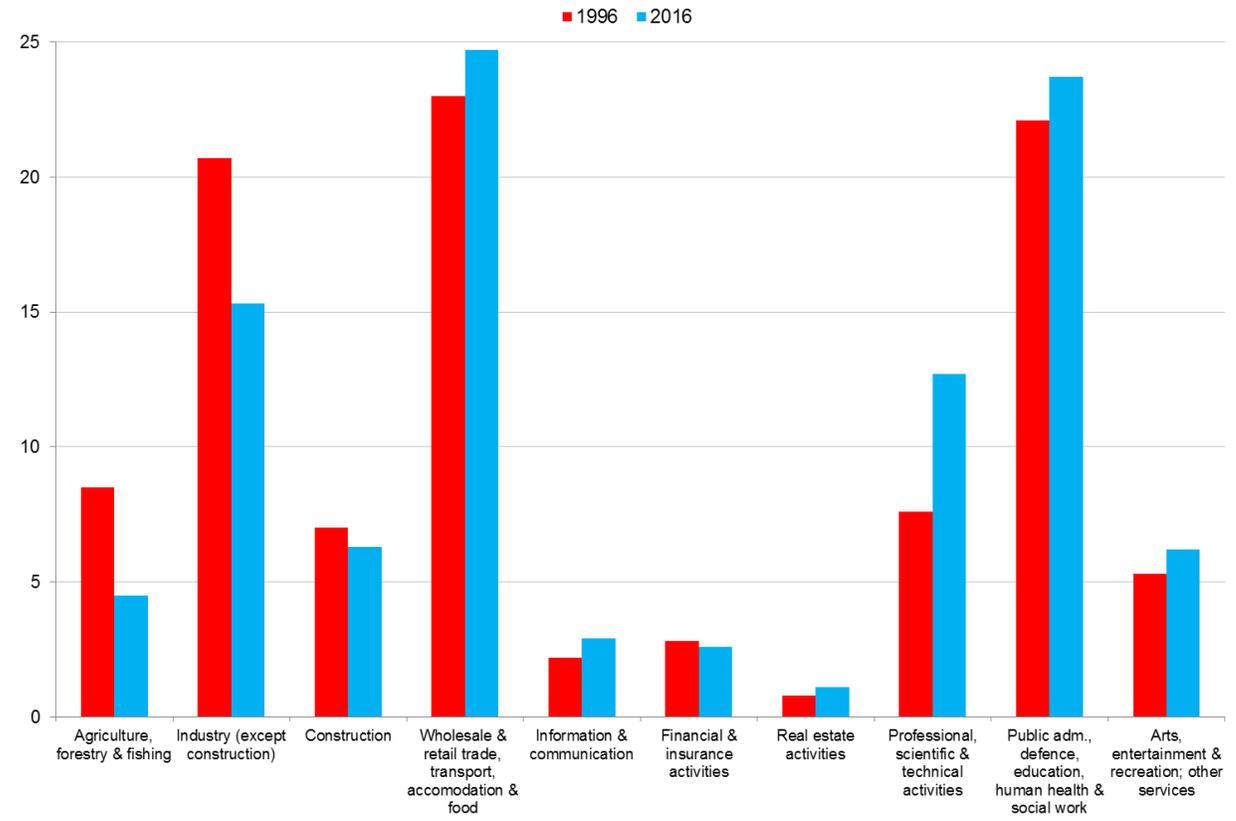
Shifting patterns of employment

- Increasing service sector jobs

- 20-year changes: Agriculture halved, Industry down a quarter, and Services up one fifth
- Increasing MSD and PSR

- Outsourcing or reshoring

- Proposal for a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)
- EU Plastics Strategy
- Return of jobs in industry?



New risks?

- Pandemics
 - Health and care sectors
 - Other essential jobs
 - Role of OSH
- Structural ICT vulnerabilities
 - Systems need to be robust and resilient
 - Consider impact on workers
- Shifts in society's views and behaviours
 - E.g. 'farmer bashing', attitudes to COVID-19 healthcare workers, attention on meat processing and COVID-19
 - Ethical consumer, societal expectations, CSR and reporting systems
 - Attitudes to various industries' impact on climate
- New technology and materials
 - 5G and the digital universe
 - Developing intelligent materials, nano-formulations and advanced composites

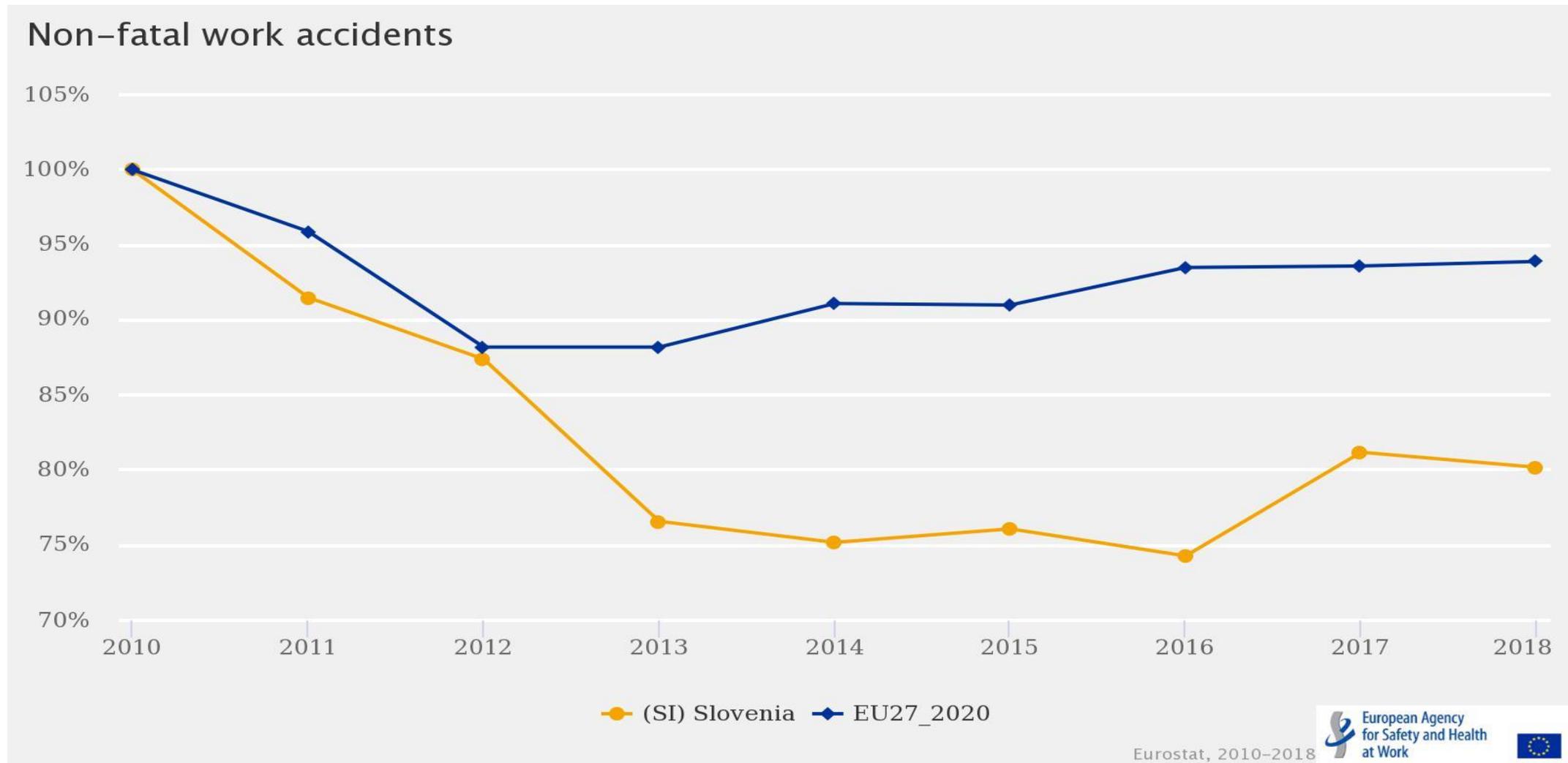
The 'top' emerging biological risks identified

Occupational risks related to global epidemics are the biggest emerging issue identified in this forecast, with a high level of consensus among the respondents. Even in the 21st century, we are still confronted with the emergence of new pathogens, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or avian influenza, and the re-emergence

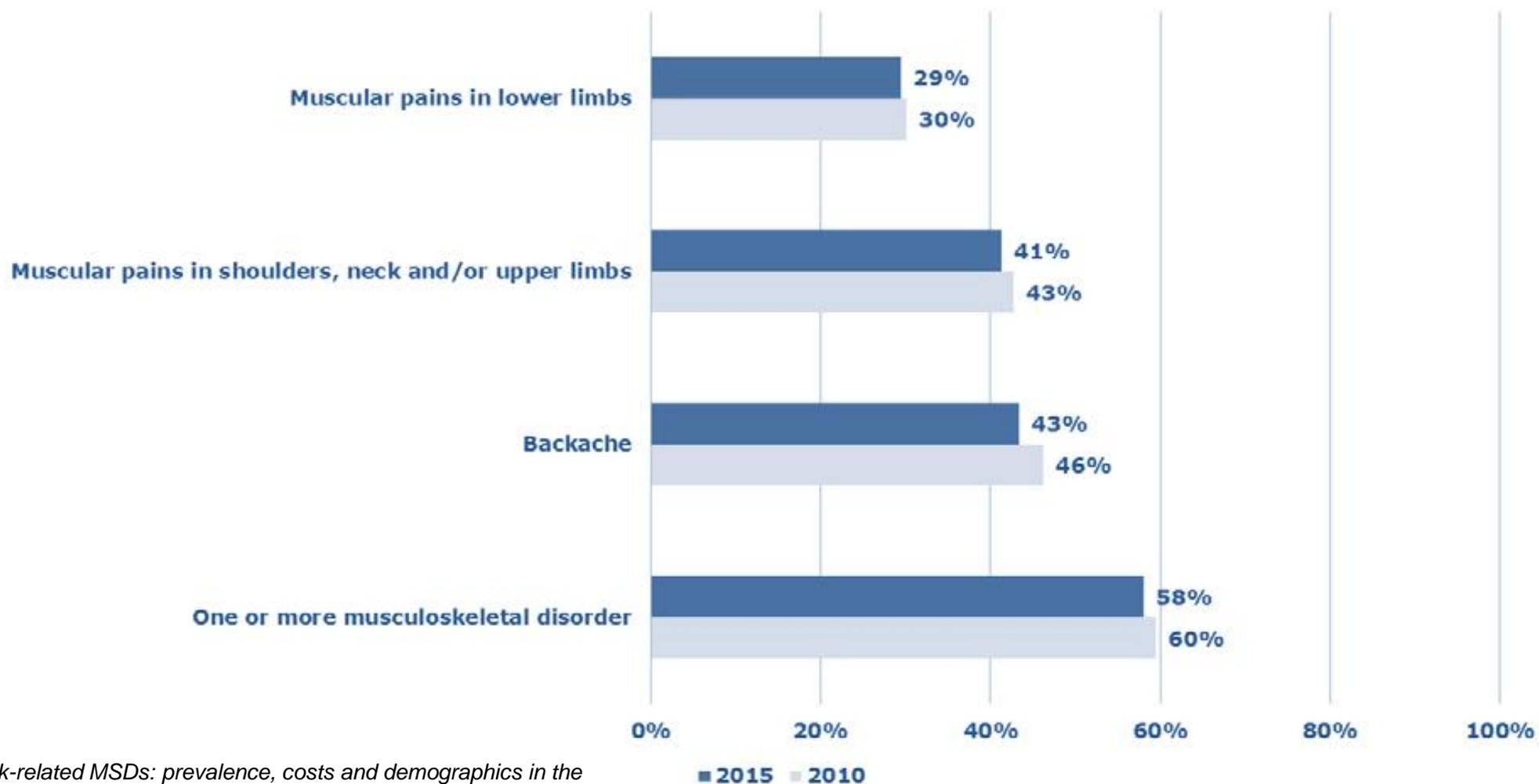
When a new contagious pathogen emerges, its worldwide spread is inevitable and is likely to be very rapid.

Trend in non-fatal work accidents 2010 - 2018

EU and Slovenia



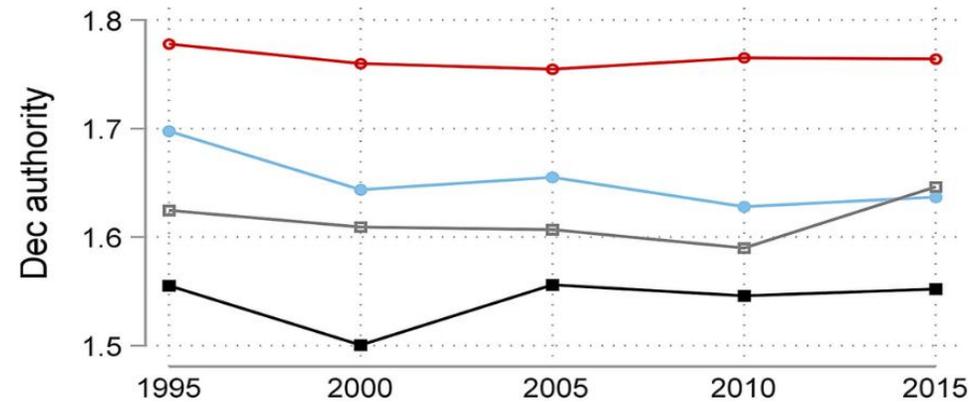
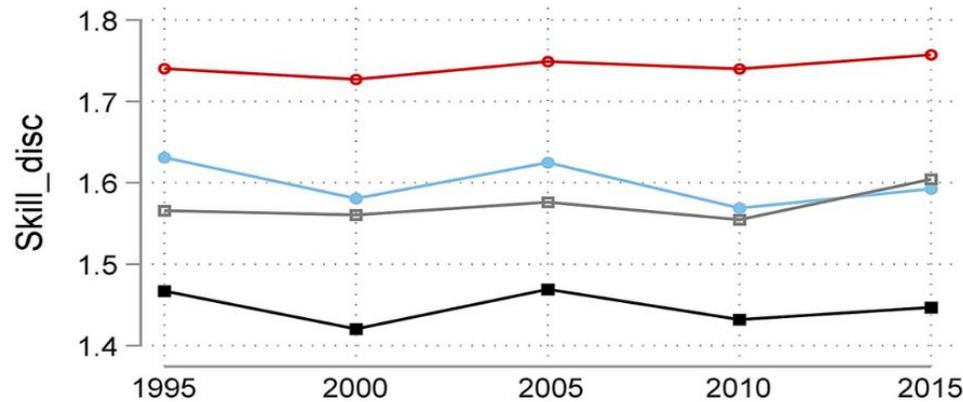
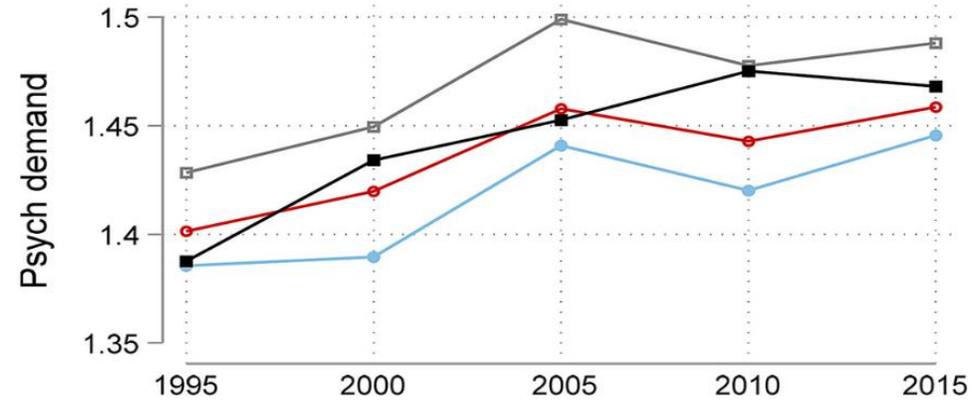
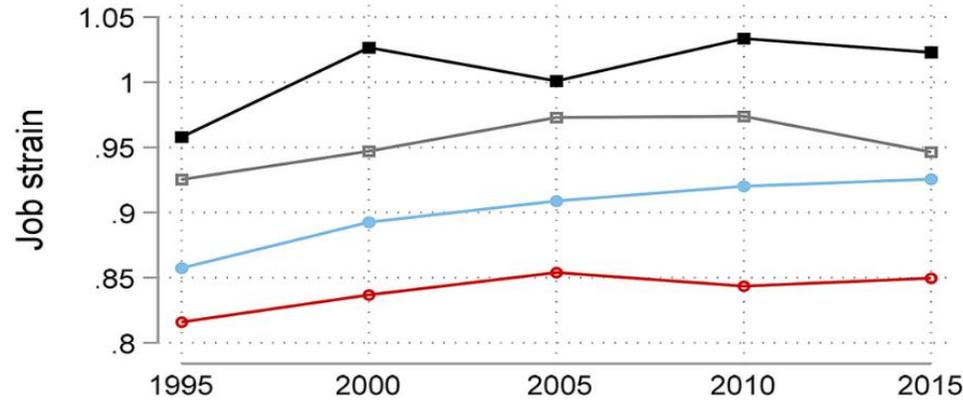
Percentage workers reporting different MSD in the past 12 months EU-28, 2010 and 2015



Work-related MSDs: prevalence, costs and demographics in the EU (EU-OSHA 2021), based on Eurofound EWCS



Analysis of trends in work stressors



- High-skilled clerical
- Low-skilled clerical
- High-skilled manual
- Low-skilled manual

Rigó, M., Dragano, N., Wahrendorf, M. *et al.* Work stress on rise? Comparative analysis of trends in work stressors using the European working conditions survey. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health* **94**, 459–474 (2021)



Contributing to a strong evidence base: surveys, foresight, monitoring

- Workplace survey, ESENER – 2009, 2014, 2019 and (planned) 2024
 - 45,000 interviews with person responsible for OSH investigating prevention in practice
- Workers' Exposure Survey on cancer risk factors
 - Six Member States (IE, DE, FR, FI, ES and HU), findings in 2023
- Joint SLIC survey of labour inspectors
 - 2021 pilot survey of 2,091 inspectors on high-risk occupations, COVID-19 and seasonal workers
- Foresight exercises
 - OSH and the circular economy
 - Expert reviews and articles
- EU OSH Information System + OSH Barometer
 - 14 indicators comprising 91 individual datasets
 - State of OSH in the EU report



Contributing to a strong evidence base: OSH Overviews

- Musculoskeletal disorders (2017-2021)
 - Prevalence, costs, demographics
 - Chronic MSDs, static postures, rehabilitation and return to work, psychosocial link, telework
- Digitalisation (2020-2023)
 - Automation (robotics and AI), AI-based worker management, online platforms, monitoring systems
- Supporting compliance (2020-2023)
 - Enforcement, prevention services, social reporting, supply chains and business incentives
- Psychosocial risks and mental health (2022-2025)
 - Scoping phase in 2021
- Health and care sectors (2023-2026)
 - Scoping phase in 2022
- Circulatory diseases (proposal for 2024-2027)



1. Describing the state of knowledge
2. Reviewing policy and practice
3. Exploring the role of intermediaries
4. Identifying prevention measures at the workplace

Thank you

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