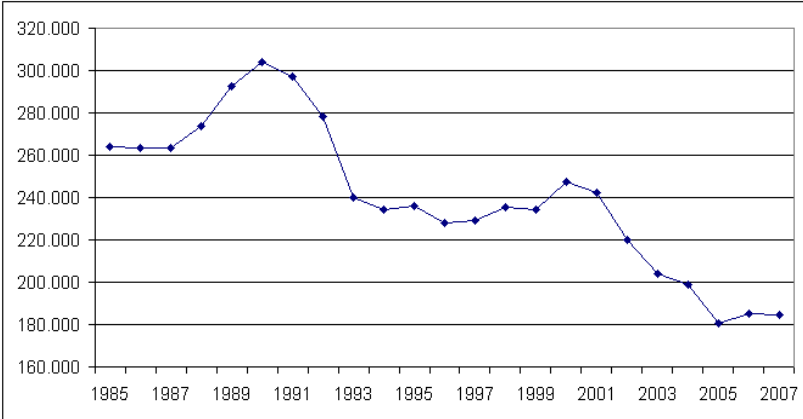


Trends in the Belgian occupational accidents branch

1985-2007: 700,000 more jobs, 80,000 fewer occupational accidents in Belgium

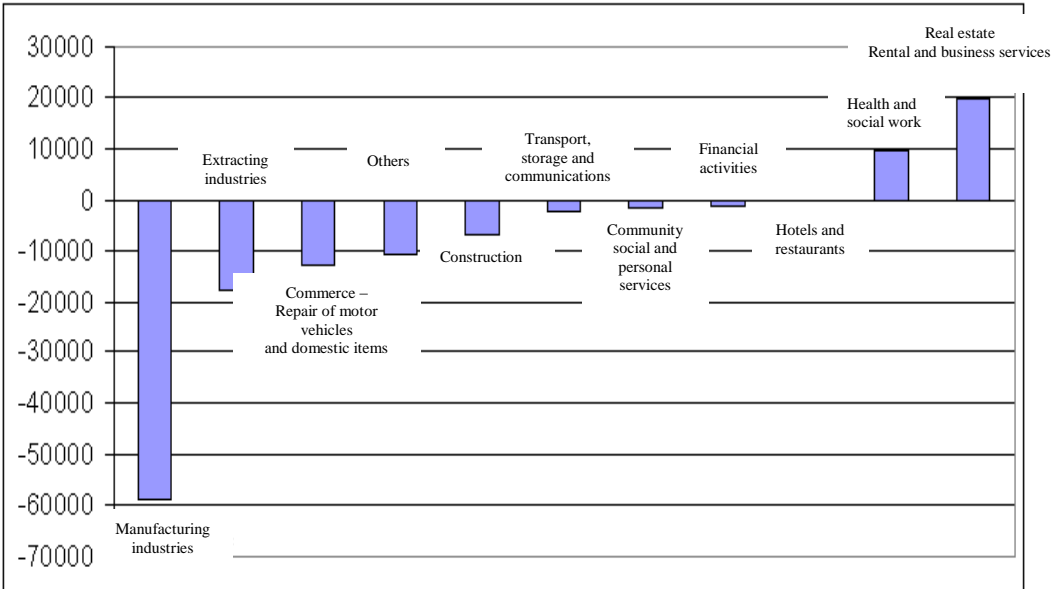
Number of accidents from 1985 to 2007



The number of occupational accidents dropped by 80,000 between 1985 and 2007, while 700,000 jobs were created during the same period.

The health and social work sector and business services sectors were the sole ones to report a higher number of accidents during these two years: up 10,000 for health/social work and 20,000 for business services.

Increases or declines in the number of occupational accidents in 2007 relative to 1985 by fields of activity



Sources: INS (1985) – FAT (2007)

The structure of employment in the private sector has undergone extensive changes over the last two decades. These transformations have had an impact on the number and breakdown of occupational accidents according to the fields of activities. The bulk of the changes is the result of the "more employment, fewer accidents" paradox.

Change to the structure of employment

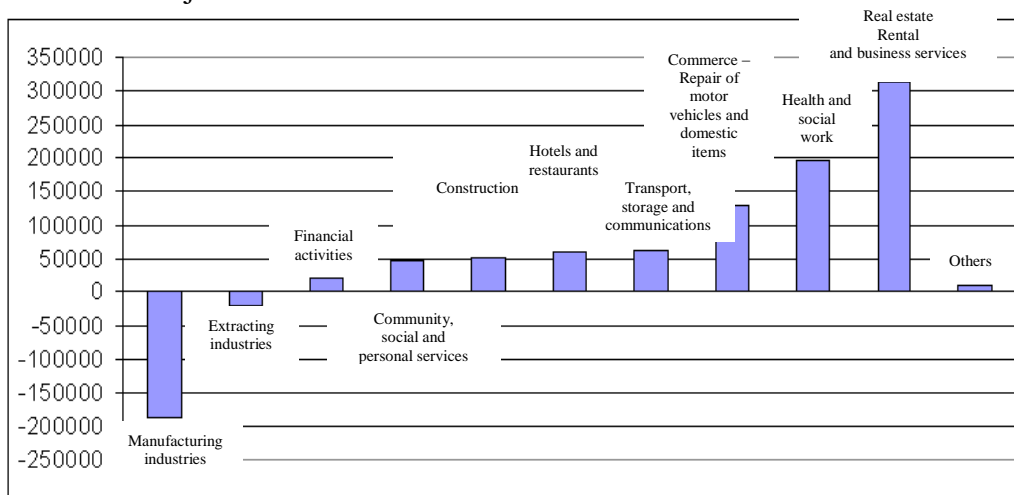
The rate of employment in the primary sector (agriculture, fisheries, logging, mining) and secondary sector (activities related to the conversion of raw materials) has edged slightly down, whereas it has increased substantially in the case of the tertiary (services) and quaternary (healthcare, social welfare, social and cultural) sectors. Employment growth in these two sectors is inextricably linked to the rise in the rate of female employment.

At the same time, there has been a shift in the status of manual employees, a status normally based on the type of work performed. In the early 1990s the number of non-manual employees caught up with the number of manual ones. This number has continued to rise ever since, whereas the figure for manual employment has remained unchanged.

The higher level of accidents in the health and social work sector is inherently related to the higher level of employment, although this does not mean the sector is a particularly dangerous one, given that the frequency and severity rates are lower than the average rates for the private sector. However, the size of this growing sector is a key to the trend in accidents at work.

Complete or partial disappearance of certain industries

Gains and losses of jobs between 1985 and 2007



Sources: National Social Security Office - jobs (1985-2007)

Two fields of activity report a decline in the number of jobs between 1985 and 2007: the manufacturing industries and extractive industries. A particularly dangerous occupation, the mining and quarrying industry virtually disappeared with the closure of the last remaining mines in Limbourg back in 1988. 16,000 accidents were reported in this industry in 1985. Most of the 186,000 jobs shed by the manufacturing industries since 1985 were accounted for by textiles and clothing, metalworking, the manufacture of radio, television and communication equipment and furniture manufacturing. The termination of mining and the decline in manufacturing activities obviously helped improve the occupational accident statistics. There were 60,000 fewer industrial accidents in 2007 than in 1985.

Better working conditions?

In other fields of activity the number of employees has risen, while the number of accidents has declined: in the high-risk construction sector 50,000 new jobs have been created since

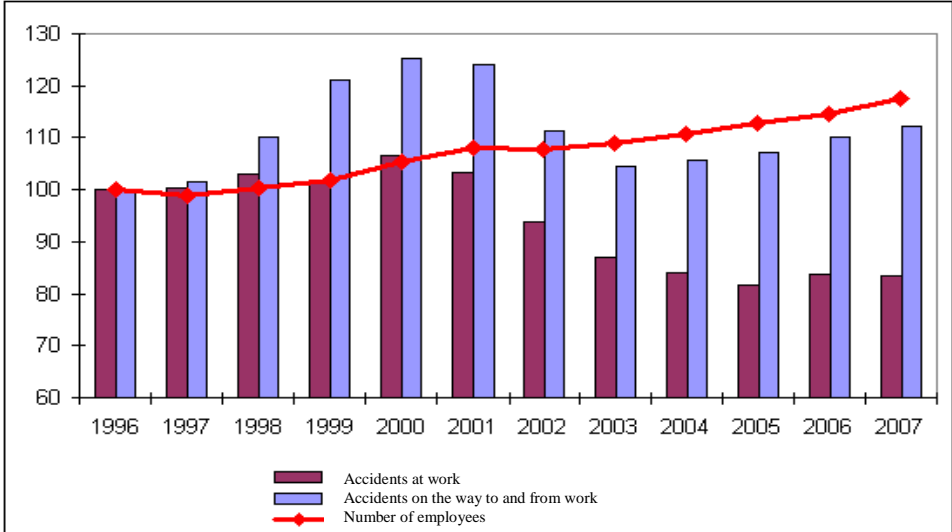
1985 but there were 7,000 fewer accidents in 2007 than in 1985. In the case of the wholesale or retail trade, the repair of vehicles and domestic items there were 12,000 fewer accidents even though 130,000 jobs were created. The hotel/restaurant and transport sectors together accounted for over 122,000 new jobs but the number of accidents remained unchanged in the case of the former and was slightly down in the case of the latter. Better working conditions must have played a key part in this change for the better, according to the figures reported for these sectors.

Business services and temporary employment

In addition to the health/ social work sector, the business services sector has made its mark on the economy. The sector's threefold increase within the space of 20 years was mainly driven by the temporary employment situation. In common with the health/social work sector, where temporary jobs also abound, the business services industry has witnessed an increase in the number of occupational accidents since 1985. The frequency and severity rates for the services sector as a whole are close to the average rates for the private sector but when the sector is broken down into its separate components a very mixed picture emerges. For example, the frequency rate for temporary employment is three times higher than the average rate for the private sector.

Matching developments for employment and accidents on the way to and from work

Number of occupational accidents and employment from 1996 to 2007 (1996=100)



The number of workplace accidents per 1,000 employees declined from 90 to 64 between 1996 and 2007, thereby reflecting the aforementioned overall improvement but no change for the better is reported in the case of accidents on the way to and from work, where the figure generally kept pace with the rate of employment. The overall trend for commuting accidents is mainly accounted for by the business services and health/social work sectors, given their importance in the overall employment situation. What is striking is the comparatively high accident rate for these two sectors, which account for 38% of accidents on the way to and from work and 25% of private sector employment.

1985-2007: What to make of the situation?

The frequency and severity rates are a reflection of how dangerous a sector is. The sectors topping the ranking list for these rates are construction, transport and supporting transport services and metalworking. The present situation can be seen to have improved when compared with the rates for 1985, when they took the top positions behind the extractive industries. The transport and storage sector reported 204 accidents per 1,000 jobs in 1985, compared with 103 accidents for the same number of workplaces at present.

A 50% reduction for the private sector as a whole.

As for the severity of the accidents, a serious accident is defined as a fatal accident or one leading to permanent after-effect. During the 1985-2001 period, there was little change in the percentage of accidents resulting in a permanent disability pursuant to a judgement or a decision by the a for occupational accidents. Irrespective of the number of accidents occurring every year during the period under consideration, some 3% of them were regulated on the basis of a permanent disability. The average disability rate recognised during this period remained unchanged at 7 to 8%.

Indirect consequence of the crisis: onset of a decline in occupational accidents starting in 2008-2010

Initial signs in late 2008

The Belgian economy went into a recession in the second half of 2008, while employment showed early signs of fragility, with a delayed impact: employment in textile manufacturing fell by 10.6% between the 3rd and 4th quarter 2008. Others that fare no better include construction and motor vehicle assembly (-9.9%) and metalworking (-8.5%). The manufacturing industries overall report a decline of over 3.3 % in the level of employment. The less secure jobs were the first to go: the number of temporary employment contracts dropped 20% on 31 December 2008, compared with the previous quarter. Not all sectors were affected: the rate of employment in the human health/social work sector continued to rise, mainly because of the service voucher system.

Trend intensifies in 2009

The impact the crisis made on the employment situation worsened in 2009, with the number of employees in the industrial sector continuing to decrease. A seasonally adjusted comparison of the first six months of 2008 and 2009 reveals a 8.6 % decline in the number of full time equivalent employees in industry, the production of electricity, water and gas and waste management. Sectors, such as business services, whose activities are inextricably linked with the industrial sector, follow suit (-7%). The sector with the highest level of serious accidents, the construction industry, also suffered job losses compared with the first half of 2007 (-3.9%).

The negative employment trend almost inevitably had an impact on the occupational accidents statistics: in the first half of 2009 workplace accidents in industry were down 24.4% on the previous year, down 29.2% in business services, whereas the human health/social work

sector, where the rate of employment continued to rise in 2009, reported a nigh-on 1% increase in the number of occupational accidents.

Risk of Belgian workplace accidents stabilised in 2010, in spite of the economic recovery

2010 was a year in which the economic recovery and its welcome impact on the labour market was particularly beneficial for sectors worst affected by the crisis: temporary employment, industry and logistics (sectors more prone than others to the risk of accidents). The annual report by the Fund for occupational accidents (FOA) shows that in 2010 the economic recovery led to a *slight increase in the percentage of occupational accidents but the overall number (178,499) was well below that of 2008 (188,300)*. The upswing in employment, particularly in the case of manual employees, resulted in 10,298 more accidents 2010, up 6.1 %. It should be stressed, however, that the number of occupational accidents in 2010 is lower than the figure for the last five years, apart from 2009, when there was a downturn in economic activity.

The economic recovery did not therefore result in a higher risk of workplace accidents, as this even tended to show a relatively steady decrease in the long term. The frequency and severity rates in 2010, qualifying the number of workplace accidents and the length of temporary disability in the light of the number of hours during which employees are exposed to the risk of accidents, are almost a repeat of the rates in 2009, and nowhere near the rates reported in 2008.

Conclusion:

Workplace accidents 50% down on the 1960s

The situation does not often change very much from one year to another, unless an overwhelming event bursts upon the scene, as in the case of the economic crisis in 2009. A clearer idea of the actual occupational accident risk trend is more likely to be gained from considering a sufficiently long period of time while bearing in mind that the accident recording methods changed during the period in question.

330,281 workplace accidents were reported in 1969 but this figure was more than halved by 2010 (150,944). And this is explained by the radical change to the industrial sector and the structure of employment. The number of jobs may have shot up (962,000 more employees in 2010 than in 1960) but the number of occupational accidents fell in line with the dwindling of employment in high-risk sectors, such as mining. Equipment upgrades and accident prevention policies have also helped to improve the situation.

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