



# Sustainable work – for health and job longevity

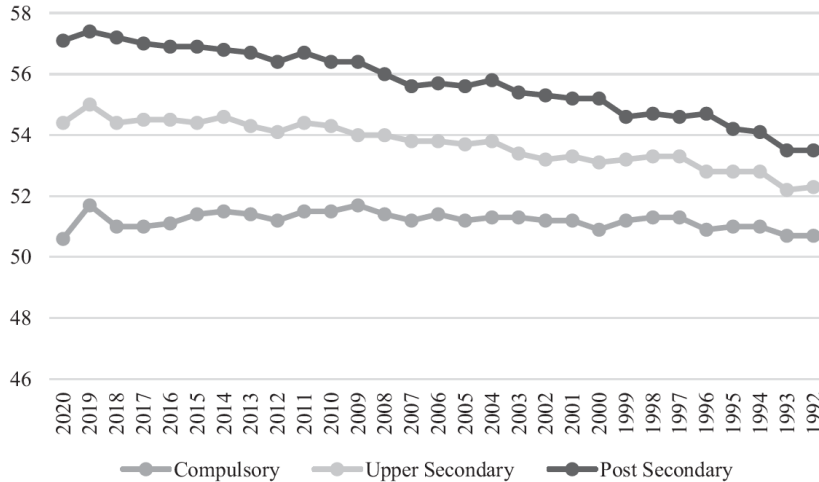
Maria Albin, professor, Occupational and Environmental Medicine

# Dilemma for sustainable work



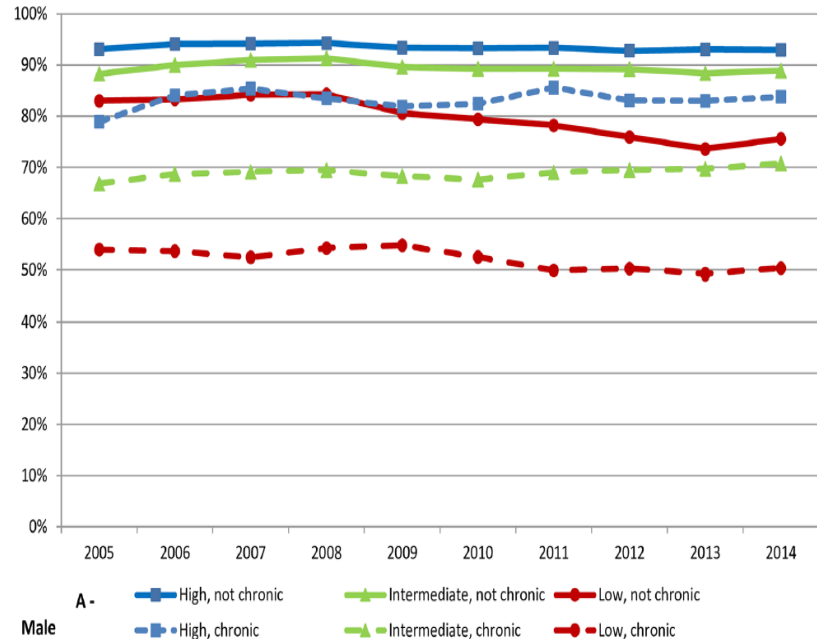
# Increasing social disparities in health

## Workplaces and policy face increasing heterogeneity



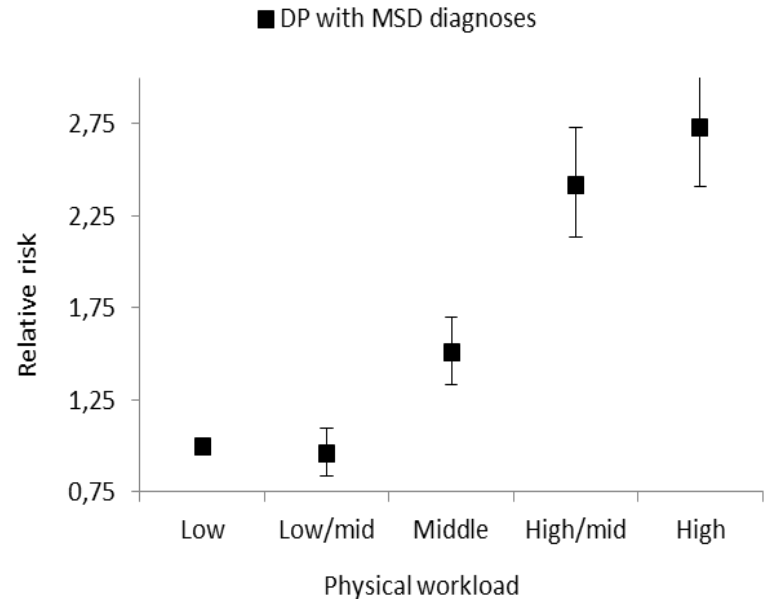
**Fig. 3.** Remaining life expectancy at age 30 by highest attained educational level. Women. From: Folkhälsodata (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

## Work participation w/wo chronic disease by educational level, men (SILC)

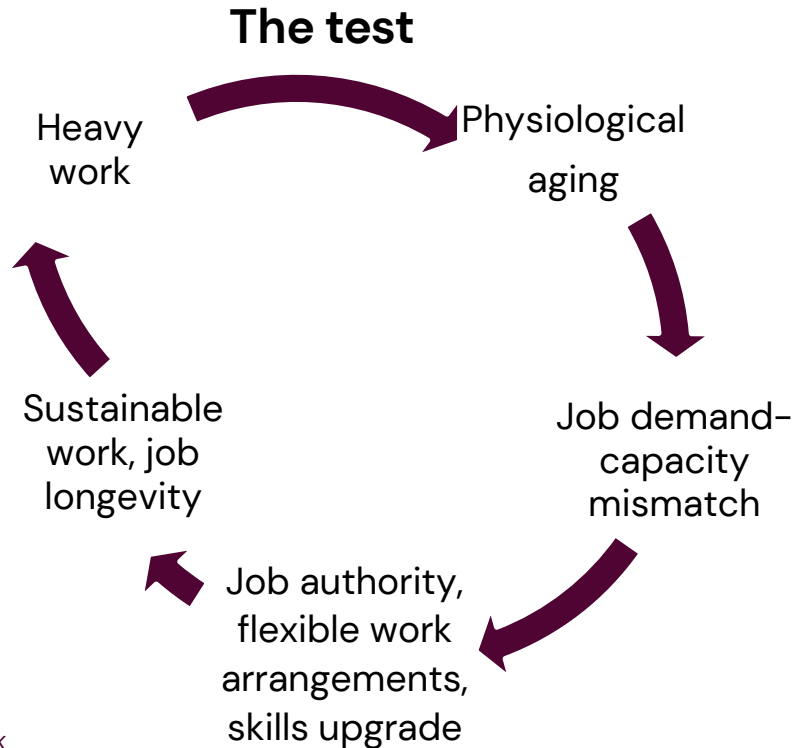


# Heavy physical work – a key driver of inequalities in work participation among ageing workers

- Early exit, mainly disability pension, strongly associated with physical workload
  - with MSD diagnoses (causal)
  - with cardiovascular and respiratory disease
    - i.e. a barrier to continue heavy work
      - Falkstedt et al 2021
- Shift to lower load decreases disability pension
  - Especially in older workers
    - Badarin et al 2022



# Physically heavy work as a stress test



## Challenges

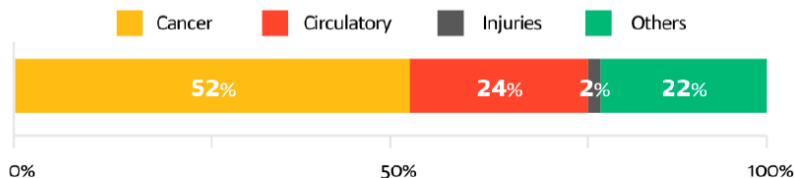
- Load exceeds individual capacity in many jobs
  - More harmful at higher ages
- Reduction key to working longer
  - Lack of workplace and national strategies
- Less access to flexible arrangements for manual workers (and OHS)

*Albin et al 2022*

# Hazardous substances shift to less control



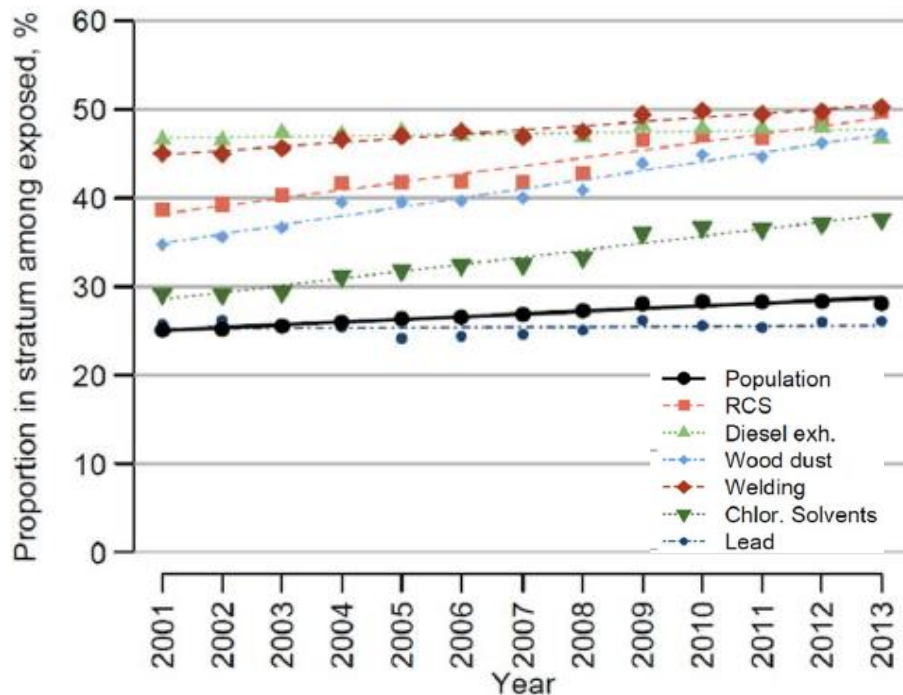
Figure 3: Causes of work-related fatalities (%) in the EU<sup>54</sup>



Source: "An international comparison of the cost of work-related accidents and illnesses", EU-OSHA 2017

- ¾ of work-related deaths caused by cancer or circulatory disease
- Trends in Sweden 1980–2013:
  - Key hazards shift to small companies, the construction sector, and immigrant workers
  - Away from sectors with strong OSH infrastructure, organized employers and organized labour

## 1-49 employees

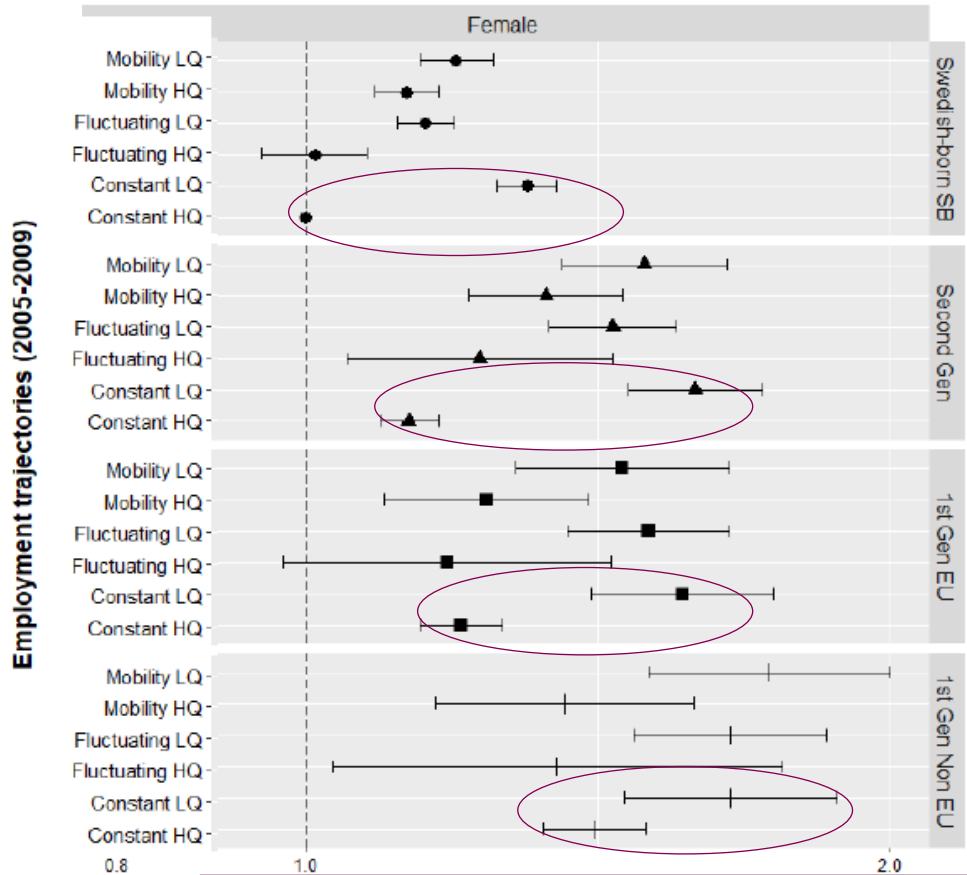


# Polarisation of working conditions

- Precarity (employment, income, likelihood of collective agreement)
- Precarious employment
  - 1992-2017 + 40% (to 14%)
  - Born outside Europe (1 out of 3)
  - Compulsory education (1 out of 4)
- Associated with common mental disorders and heart disease in follow-up studies

*Bodin et al 2022*

## Common Mental Disorders (2010-2017)



HR (95% CI) adjusted for time since migration, education, previous CMD/heredity, childhood SES (Pollack et al 2022)

# Covid-19 as a stress test...

- Increased morbidity and mortality among essential workers
  - Lack of risk assessment, safety measures
    - Rarely involved OSH-professionals
  - Lack of training and PPE
- Temporary/low-paid workers not able to stay at home when sick
- Multiple job-holders spreading disease between workplaces (care-homes)
- Disparities in vaccine uptake (income, education, immigration, job grade)
- Highlighted the
  - interrelatedness between OSH and public health
  - the right to Safe and Healthy Work



# Safe and healthy work – a fundamental right

- Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment  
*Agenda 2030, SDG 8, Target 8.8*
- Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment  
*Article 23, Universal declaration of Human rights 1948*
- Safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental right at work *ILO 2022*
- Every worker has the right to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity  
*Article 34 , Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000*

**Sustainability**

# The possibilities and challenges

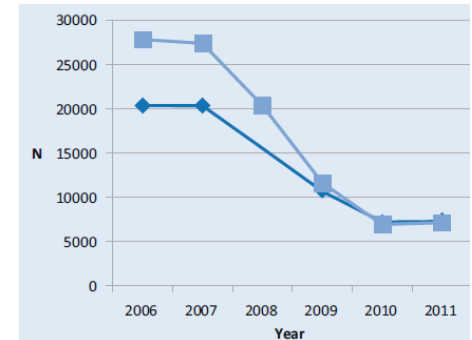
Sustainable work, job longevity

Closing gap in health  
Enabling technologies  
Shortage of skilled workers  
Skills upgrade to match digital and green transitions  
Supportive and inclusive welfare systems

Health disparities  
Cost of living crisis  
Poor incentives for sustainable work for low-skilled workers  
Policies based on averages  
Increasingly restrictive welfare systems  
Relatives taking on more of elderly care

Increasing inequalities

Granted disability pensions 2006–2011:  
women – 75%, men –66% (Sweden)



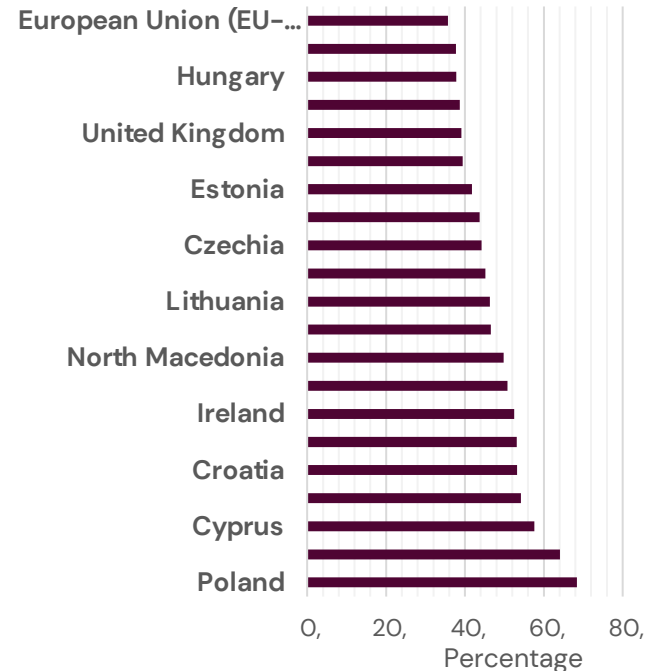
# Alternative – untapped resources

## Working years lost (WYL) age 30–66 by educational level (NL)

	Disability benefits	Unemployment	(Early) retirement
	WYL (95% CI)	WYL (95% CI)	WYL (95% CI)
Men			
Low	3.4 (3.4–3.4)	6.3 (6.2–6.3)	2.0 (2.0–2.0)
Intermediate	1.8 (1.8–1.8)	3.4 (3.4–3.5)	2.3 (2.3–2.3)
High	0.8 (0.8–0.8)	1.9 (1.9–1.2)	2.4 (2.4–2.5)
Absolute difference (low-high)	2.6	4.3	-0.5

*Robroek et al ScandJ Work Env Health 2020*

## Inactive population (% of age 20–64) due to caring responsibilities, females (Eurostat 2020)



# Workforce resilience, and sustainable work can be achieved by known measures

- Age-conscious risk assessment at the workplace
- Preventive measures throughout working life
  - Loss of work-ability starts early
- Preventive measures matching workers' needs
  - Work safety, work matched to capacity, health promotion (Total-worker-health)
- Life-long learning (especially for short education)
- Inclusive welfare systems, protecting life-chances
  - Affordable and good child- and elderly care
  - Sick-leave compensation, disability pension
- Sustainable work in all policies –e.g. public procurement of fair work

**IMM**  
Institute of Environmental Medicine  
Institutet för Miljömedicin



**Karolinska  
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