

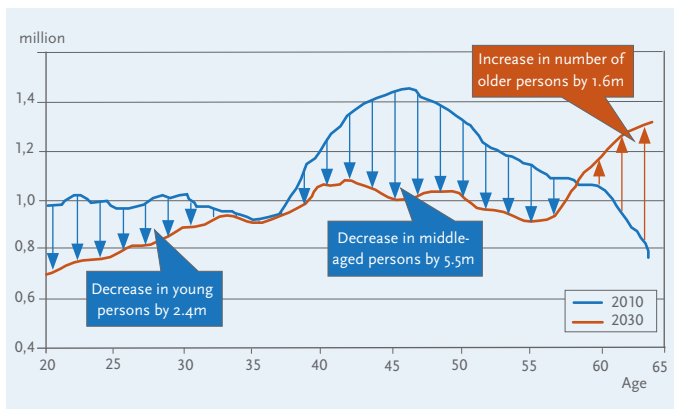
Demographic change at work

Heavy physical work puts more strain on older people

Fewer younger people, more elderly people. This change in the size and age structure of the population is referred to as a demographic change. This trend affects the working environment in particular. The **working population**, that is, employees, the unemployed, self-employed, freelancers or unpaid family workers, is now aging faster in Germany than the population as a whole. Some consequences of the demographic change for the working environment are described below.

The population is aging

The population structure is changing constantly. Fig. 1 shows the development of the population in 2010 and in the future. If one compares the estimate for the year 2030 with the situation in the year 2010, one can see a reduction in the younger and middle-aged age groups. In contrast, the percentage of older persons is increasing. At present, the heavily represented age groups of the so-called baby boomer generation (in Germany: from 1955) are influencing the age structure. The strongest birth cohort is that of people born in 1964, who were 46 in 2010 and turn 50 this year.



Source: Federal Statistical Office. 12th coordinated population projection, variant 1-W2
 In: BMI: Demographiebericht – Bericht der Bundesregierung zur demografischen Lage und künftigen Entwicklung des Landes, p. 106, Berlin 2011

Fig. 1: Population based on age for the year 2010 and estimate of the population for the year 2030

This aging of the population will not remain without consequences for the world of work. Working life will be longer than in earlier generations, also as a result of raising the standard retirement age. This is why it will become increasingly important to maintain and support the ability to work of employed persons. It is important here to structure work so that those who are already older today can carry out their work until they reach retirement age. If we compare working life with a long-distance run, humane work structures and preventive meas-

ures should also ensure that people do not become worn out at an early stage. This is why it is important to start with younger people. In order for perfectly fitting prevention concepts to be realised, the working conditions of younger and older people have to be considered.

Job requirements at every age?

In the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012 over 17,000 persons in dependent employment were interviewed among other things on their physical working conditions. Lifting and carrying heavy loads, or frequent standing during work, strain the body over time can be linked to an increased health risk. The same applies to forced postures that make it necessary to work bending over, kneeling, lying down or overhead working. The following graph shows how frequently these physical working conditions occur in three different age groups.

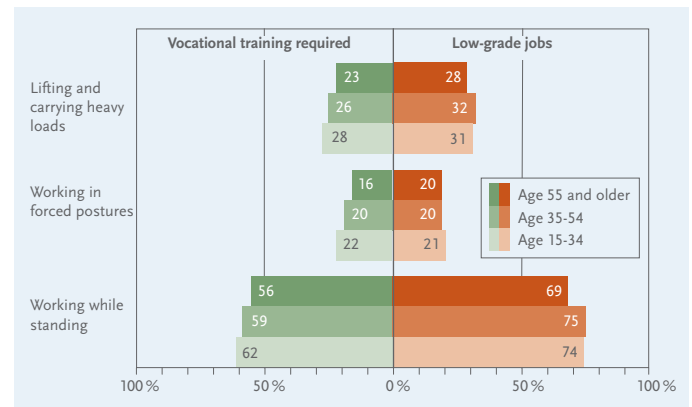


Fig. 2: Percentage share of employees who state that they are frequently exposed to these conditions

The graph shows the results for two groups of persons in dependent employment. Low-grade jobs usually mean semi-skilled work for which special vocational training is not required. If vocational training is required, skilled work is carried out. The results for work for which a university degree is required are not shown. Of the working conditions shown here,

only working while standing is widespread among these employees. The two groups shown differ hardly at all with regard to work under forced postures: among those without a vocational qualification, 21% of the youngest and 20% of both the middle and the older groups stated that they frequently had to work in a forced posture. The shares are very similar among persons with vocational training: 22% of young persons, 20% of the middle group and 16% of older persons.

However, lifting and carrying heavy loads and working while standing are far more widespread in low-grade jobs than in jobs for skilled workers. In each age group, more employees with low-grade jobs than employees with vocational training say that they frequently have to lift and carry heavy loads and to work while standing.

If we compare the age groups with one another in the second step, the younger and middle age groups are more frequently affected by physically stressful working conditions than the older group. However, the differences are slight. Age does not appear to play a great part in the question of the job that is allocated to a person. However, it may be that some older employees have left the labour market for health reasons (to draw disability benefits, for example) and the so-called „healthy worker“ effect can be seen. This effect means that in the 55-64 age group only those persons could be found who are fit enough so that they can still be employed in physically demanding jobs.

However, clear differences can be seen in the question whether the working conditions that are shown in Fig. 3 in the example of employees in jobs for which vocational training is required are experienced as stressful. For forced postures as stress increases from 41% of those aged 15-34 to 57% of those aged 55-64. The proportion of those who experience heavy work as

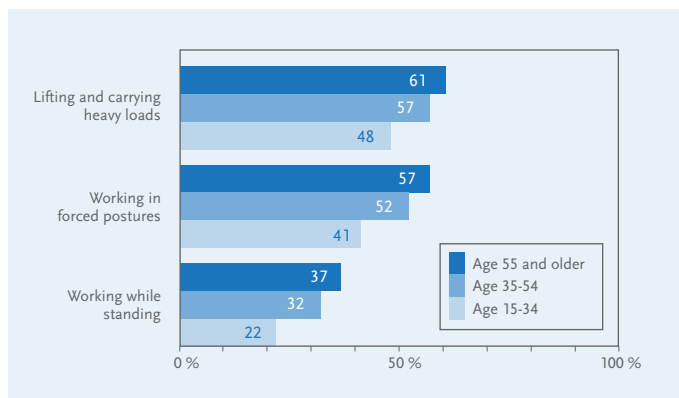


Fig. 3: Percentage share of employed persons who feel stressed if they are frequently exposed to these working conditions – with the example of jobs for which vocational training is required

stress increases therefore as people age. This is regardless of whether those affected are employees with low-grade jobs or skilled workers.

What can be done? – Prevention for a healthy working life

Employees with low-grade jobs and those whose jobs require vocational training are affected above all by physical demands such as lifting and carrying, working in forced postures or working while standing. Exactly fitting concepts for prevention require first of all a risk assessment (www.gefaehrungsbeurteilung.de). Risk assessments are the central element in health and safety at work. They form the basis for systematic and successful safety and health management. All foreseeable workflows and age-related work organisation are to be taken into account here. One challenge is to win companies over to investments that benefit the improvement of working conditions for low-grade jobs. A further challenge consists in winning young people over to prevention, even if the proportion of those who perceive stress is still comparatively low. However, in order to prevent wear through physically demanding work at an early stage, it is necessary to be active already with young people as well.

Would you like to know more about this?

You can find information on work organisation that respects the aging process here:

Go to www.inqa.de and enter “Demography“ in the menu “Publications“.

You will find an overview of the demography checks at www.inqa.de/SharedDocs/PDFs/DE/Meldungen/Diversity/demographie-check-ueberblick.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

Working longer in healthy organisations – www.lago-projekt.de

Over 350 companies and institutions have come together in Demographie Netzwerk e.V. (ddn) – www.demographie-netzwerk.de – a non-profit making association, to play an active part in organising the demographic change.

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