



Österreichische
ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzstrategie 2013–2020



Mit
Sicherheit!

Ageing-appropriate work design

Occupational Safety and Health Strategy 2013-2020

Publishing information

Media owner and publisher

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection – Labour Inspectorate

Location: 1040 Vienna, Favoritenstraße 7

Authors: Working Group 3 - Prevention of work-related health hazards and occupational diseases

Cover photo: © fotolia.com

This brochure does not claim to be exhaustive

December 2015

I. Introduction

The Health and Safety at Work Act obliges employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees in relation to all aspects of work. This also includes designing and structuring work to take into account the ageing of workers. The health and ability to work of employees must be ensured for all generations by means of ageing-appropriate working conditions.

Older employees are accounting for an increasing proportion of the workforce. This means that:

- Longer working hours signify a longer and thus greater effect of harmful and/or demanding working conditions.
- Promoting and utilising the potential of older persons is an approach to avoid the loss of their skills and knowledge.
- The increasing age of the workforce means that more of these people have chronic health problems and thus specific needs.
- Older employees are not a homogeneous group; there can be considerable differences between persons of the same age, and this needs to be taken into account. Gender-specific differences also need to be considered.
- Certain dangers and stress factors are of particular relevance for older people and require special measures.
- There is also inequality in working conditions in the workplace due to industry-specific risks/stress factors (e.g. carrying heavy loads, monotonous work, forced physical postures, mental strains).
- Reintegration initiatives after longer periods of sick leave are gaining in significance, also at a company level.

The ageing process already begins when people are young, which is why ageing-appropriate working should begin with young employees.

II. Legal basis: the Health and Safety at Work Act (ASchG), Federal Law Gazette No. 450/1994; as amended.

Section 3(1): Employers are obliged to ensure the safety and health of their employees in relation to all aspects of work. The cost of these efforts must not be borne by the employees themselves. In order to protect the lives, health, integrity and dignity of employees, employers have to take the necessary measures, including measures to prevent work-related risks, to provide information and instruction, and to create a suitable organisational structure with the required funding.

Section 4(2): When determining and evaluating risks, workers who are particularly at risk or in need of protection should be taken into account, as well as the suitability of workers with regard to their constitution, physical strength, age and skills or qualifications (Section 6 para.1). Special emphasis should be given to the determination and evaluation of to what extent specific dangers can result in certain workplaces and in certain work process for workers who have a need for special protection. Section 6(1): When issuing tasks to workers, employers have to taken into account their suitability with regard to safety and health. Particular attention should be paid here to their constitution and physical strength, age and skills.

Further elements of the Health and Safety at Work Act (ASchG) such as the principles of risk prevention (Section 7), the design of work processes or workplaces (Sections 60 f, 66), handling loads (Section 64), or job profiles and fields of activity (Sections 76 and 81) as well as the proposals of preventive experts for the improvement of working conditions (Section 84) are of particular significance in ensuring ageing-appropriate working conditions.

Comparable regulations also apply to federal employees in accordance with the Protection of Federal Employees Act (B-BSG), Federal Law Gazette I No. 70/1999 as amended (Sections 3-7, 60f, 64, 66, 74f, 77f, 80).

III. What can companies do?

3 steps towards the goal: Ageing-appropriate work design

First step: Carry out an age-structure analysis

An analysis of the company-specific age structure can be a good way for a company to start looking at this issue more intensively. An age-structure analysis reveals the status quo and at the same time makes it possible to look into the future:

- The current age-structure data is recorded either just for all employees, or also for individual organisational units or groups of employees.
- On the basis of certain assumptions on changes in personnel numbers, a forecast for the future age structure is drawn up.

As the age structure analysis takes the future situation into account, it can act as an early warning system which can, for example, show in a timely way a need for skills training, the risk of staff shortages or necessary succession planning in the case of older employees retiring. The results of the age structure analysis are shown as a graph which makes it possible to take holistic and targeted measures in order to be prepared for the future. Here are some tools for an age-structure analysis or an age-structure check: www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at, www.eval.at, www.wko.at und www.gesundearbeit.at

Second step: Identifying work which can be particularly stressful or demanding for older people

Possible approaches:

- Risk assessment, the assessment of workplaces with regard to especially stressful work for older people; the evaluation of workplaces with a focus on older employees
- Drawing up workplace maps on the basis of the assessment of risk factors such as noise, heat, cold, physically strenuous work, lifting and carrying, working in tiring or painful postures, using the same hand and arm movements (forced static postures), night and shift work, a high speed of work, monotonous work with little possibility to change it, working under the pressure of time and deadlines, and continuous availability

Ageing-appropriate work design

Third step: Ageing-appropriate work design

Designing ageing-appropriate workplaces in companies is a complex process with a wide range of opportunities for changes and adaptations in various areas and functions of the company. Practical experience from companies shows that the following fields are particularly important for the development of ageing-appropriate working conditions (see appendix):

- Work organisation: focus on workplace design, tasks and working hours, and communications
- Health: focus on the protection of health, ergonomics, the reduction of stress and health promotion
- Further training: focus on qualifications, competences and professional development
- Leadership: focus on leadership and the advancement of employees

IV. Important factors for the success of ageing-appropriate working at a company level

Each of these four fields of action provides a wide range of opportunities. In order to achieve sustainable ageing-appropriate work organisation, it is vital to take into account the interaction of the four fields of action in the planning and implementation of measures.

A further decisive factor for the success of age management in companies is networking with occupational physicians, safety experts and industrial/organisational psychologists as well as other experts. Other key factors are the participation and involvement of works council members, safety representatives and employees in this process, as well as providing them with comprehensive information.

Workers themselves are experts with regard to their own workplaces and know the stress factors of their work very well.

Appendix: Examples of measures in the four fields of action

Field of action 1

What makes work ageing-appropriate?	Recommendations for ageing-appropriate work design
Holism of work: Being able to recognise the contribution of one's own work to the overall product	The targeted use of the experience of older workers in the organisation of tasks and in dealing with complex holistic issues
Being able to work fluently, with sufficient time available and without disturbing interruptions	Ensuring that work is carried out in line with the required specifications, that there is sufficient information and that operational planning takes effect quickly
Ensuring independence of action when carrying out work	As far as possible, allowing workers to make their own decisions in relation to work processes and the use of equipment
Diversity of work	Varied tasks – encouraging a combination of types of work with physical and mental demands
Organisation of working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A target break culture with breaks designed to promote regeneration • Ageing-appropriate shift plan design • Offering sabbaticals and flexitime schemes • Enabling the organisation of work to be increasingly oriented towards people's individual resources
Cooperation: communicating in time and cooperating sufficiently	Taking useful competences of older employees into account sufficiently via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the prioritisation of a goal or a task depending on the worker's own wishes and the loss of personal abilities (selection) • the continuous improvement of personal abilities (optimisation) • learning and applying alternative competences (compensation)¹

¹ The pianist Arthur Rubinstein candidly spoke about the secret of his success in an interview: firstly, he played fewer pieces and thus had less to remember (selection). Secondly, he practised these pieces more frequently (optimisation). And thirdly, he played particularly slowly before fast passages, which made the slower ones seem more significant and the fast ones seem faster (compensation).

((Source: Die Zeit 7.8.2003 in the article "Der Rat der Greise" [The Advice of the Aged] www.zeit.de/2003/33/P-Baltes)

Ageing-appropriate work design

Field of action 2: Health

What makes work ageing-appropriate?	Recommendations for ageing-appropriate work design
Ergonomic design of the workplace: e.g. by adapting the workplace to the person's individual radius of action, by means of lifting and carrying aids and via balanced hand and arm movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making physical work easier via the deployment of technical aids • Activities without the frequent raising of the arms (working above head height) or frequently using bent arms, and without frequent twisting of the spine • Workplace-related improvement of movement and posture, e.g. via workplace-related compensatory exercises
Reduction and/or limitation of work in difficult conditions, such as reduction of work in cold and heat, limiting noise and vibrations, and the improvement of workplace lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of ventilation and shading systems; provision of unsweetened drinks • The deployment of sound-proofing elements in workshops, better audibility and visibility of warning signals • No excessive lighting which dazzles, but stronger lighting for specific work • Single, individually adjustable lights and individually adjustable light protection
Taking varying degrees of perceptual ability into account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying work instructions in various ways (e.g. posters, videos and diagrams instead of only in writing) • Enlargement of writing and symbols

Field of action 3: Skills training

What makes work ageing-appropriate?	Recommendations for ageing-appropriate work design
Use available knowledge for the work and learn new Things Work fits in with skills/qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic use of the experience of older people Tandem systems between old and young (teaching and learning) • Age-sensitive career planning: getting the opportunity to be able to take on other new tasks throughout working life • Learning from each other in a colourful mixture of generations Teams of mixed ages and ethnicities
Skills training for new work, human resources planning and personnel development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the knowledge from the experience and specialist knowledge of older employees (taking gender and diversity into account) in the • restructuring of work processes, the organisation of work and the creation of training programmes • Encouraging learning at all ages: offering further and continuing education and training independently of age and field of work • Taking into account the different approaches to learning of different generations

Field of action 4: Leadership

What makes work ageing-appropriate?	Recommendations for ageing-appropriate work design
Social support: Social behaviour which does not exclude and develops a feeling of togetherness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role-model effect of managers: treating each other respectfully • Social support from superiors helps to cope with stress in the workplace
Feedback, recognition and appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of management tools such as age-sensitive, life-phase oriented interviews with staff and exchanges of experience in which recognition for older employees is shown. • Giving appropriate, prompt and detailed feedback on work • Constructive error management
Life phase-oriented management style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the awareness of managers for age and ageing as a reconstruction processes, and for strengths which are related to the respective age • Designing specific tasks so that they correspond to the skills of the employees

Ageing-appropriate work design

Link tips:

www.arbeitundalter.at: Ageing-appropriate work organisation - information on the joint website of the social partners. Contains descriptions of examples of its realisation in companies, practical experience and specific tips as well as solutions for ageing-appropriate working.

www.nestorgold.at: The Nestor Gold seal of quality from the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection is for companies and organisations which promote the potential and needs of their older employees as well as dialogue between the generations, and which undergo a special certification process.

www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at: Offers comprehensive information on the issue of working environments which are age- and ageing-appropriate.

www.eval.at: Ageing-appropriate work design plus information and documentation aids on safety and health in the workplace with a special focus of age.

www.fit2work.at: Fit2work is an information and advice programme for persons and companies on how people can remain in the working process or be reintegrated.

www.gesundearbeit.at: Fundamental information on the issues of age- and ageing-appropriate work as well as design tips, checklists, book tips and interesting links.

www.wko.at: Demographic trends in companies. Information on and instruments for Demography Check, a tool for company age-structure analysis and retaining skilled workers

www.iv-net.at/iv-all/publikationen/file_651.pdf: the brochure "Perspective 50+ Best Practice-Beispiele aus der österreichischen Industrie" (examples of best practice for those aged 50+ from Austrian industry, in German). This includes numerous examples of the practical realisation of ageing-appropriate working in Austrian industry.

A cooperation between:

