

GERMANY

- The German population is one of the oldest in the world, and demographic change has attracted great policy attention over the last decade.
- There are many data sources on issues related to demographic change available, yet certain issues and specific sub-populations are not adequately represented in the data.
- There is the risk that the consequences of demographic change may therefore be underestimated.



1. Demographic context

The population of Germany is currently 81.8 million (2011), and has risen slightly, by about 1.5 million, over the last two decades as a result of increasing life expectancy and modest inward migration. Since reunification, both fertility and life expectancy have converged in East and West Germany. Fertility rates are below replacement and currently range at 1.4 children per woman. Life expectancy at ages 50/65 stands at 29.7/ 17.5 years for men and 33.4/ 20.1 years for women (2011).

The percentage of the population aged 50 and older was 41.2% in 2011 (1991: 34.4) and is expected to reach 50% around the year 2030. In response to this trend, the statutory retirement age was raised and now stands at 65 years for both men and women. It will further increase to 67 years for the 1964 birth cohort and after.

The pension system primarily rests on a pay-as-you-go system. The second pension pillar consists in occupational pensions and the third in private provisions based on investments in properties or the like. However, participation in the latter schemes is moderate and selective. About 2.5 million people were in need of old-age care in 2011. Of these, 65% were women and about 1.2 million lived at home being exclusively supported by partners, families and friends. Only around 0.7 million people re-

ceive institutionalized care. Meanwhile, the health of older people in Germany has improved. In 2008, 21% of people aged 70 to 85 reported having no or just one major disorder (1996: 18%).

2. Demographic change and policy concerns

In the federal strategy on demography called "Jedes Alter zählt" (Every age counts) and published in 2012, the following aims were highlighted: (1) Strengthening families and communities; (2) Encouraging people to engage in skilled work and maintain their health; (3) Ensuring independent and autonomous living in old age; (4) Fostering the quality of life in rural areas and pursuing an integrative urban policy; (5) Securing the preconditions for sustainable growth and welfare; and (6) Sustaining the state's ability to take action.

3. Data sources

General issues

Data are collected by various agencies and institutions, which are (partly) state-funded, but work independently from the government. For example, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) conducts the

German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP). The Robert Koch Institute (RKI Berlin) executes the German Health Interview and the Examination Survey for Adults (DEGS), as well as the Telephone Health Survey – German Health Update (GEDA). The German Centre of Gerontology (DZA Berlin) conducts the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) and the upcoming wave of the German Survey on Volunteering (FWS). The Institute for Employment Research (IAB Nuremberg) is responsible for the Labour Market and Social Security Survey (PASS) and the IAB Establishment Panel. One of the largest educational studies, the National Education Panel Study, is conducted by a network of 200 scientists at several institutes.

A wide range of datasets are provided by official statistics. For example, the annually conducted Microcensus is a 1% sample of the household population (about 830,000 respondents) and provides detailed data on the population, the labour market and the living situations of households. The themes of the JPI “More years, better lives” are covered by different surveys. There are only a few data sources which cover more than one topic comprehensively. The majority of data sources are publicly available for non-profit scientific use. Data access is often granted and facilitated by so-called research data centres.

Health and Performance

The German Health Interview and Examination Survey for Adults (DEGS), the Telephone Health Survey -German Health Update (GEDA), and the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) are the major population representative surveys on health in Germany. In addition, the Study of Health in Pomerania (SHIP) provides extensive data on the health and living situations of participants in one particular region.

Health data in Germany are reliable and widely publicly available. They cover a wide range of issues related to health (e.g. subjective health, physical health, health behaviour, use of health care system, functioning, wellbeing) and have large sample sizes. However, the majority of data sources does not sufficiently cover the very old (aged 85+), people in residential institutions, people in need of help and care, as well as those not speaking German. Furthermore, there is a relative shortage of data on health changes over time, objective health assessments and biomarkers, and on emerging issues, such as technological innovation and e-health.

Social systems and welfare

Data on different issues related to the German social and welfare systems are gathered by official surveys, such as the Microcensus and its Sample Survey of Income and Expenditure. The Microcensus has a large sample size

and a relatively small non-response bias since participation is mandated by law. The German Pension Insurance Fund provides very detailed data on employment and old-age security. The Biographical Data of Selected Social Insurance Agencies in Germany (BASID 2007) and the Sample of Insured Persons and their Insurance Accounts (VKST) are large longitudinal data sets well suited for conducting scientific analyses about pensions and employment biographies across social strata. Similarly, the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) provide longitudinal data on the life-course, employment biographies, old-age security and living standards with a greater variety of context variables than official statistics.

All of the major topics of social systems and welfare are covered in the data and cross connections to related themes like work and productivity, education and learning, or health and care are possible. Yet, information on the social situations of people at very old age, those living in institutions or at the margins of society is limited. Conclusions about societal change and social inequality are hence difficult to draw.

Work and productivity

There are many reliable, valid and longitudinal data sources in Germany in the field of work and productivity. For example, the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) and the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) allow for a detailed analysis of employment histories and a linkage to other topics, such as health, housing or the transition to retirement. The longitudinal survey Labour Market and Social Security enables researchers to analyse the unintended side effects of labour market reforms, as well as histories of work and (un-) employment and pathways into or out of welfare dependency.

Whereas these data provide information on how work is distributed across the life-course, the cross-sectional study Employment and Retirement helps identify factors relevant to older people's willingness to continue working beyond retirement age and their preferred working conditions. As the main source for the analysis of labour demand in Germany, the IAB Establishment Panel focuses on the perspective of employers. It can be used to analyse the extent to which ageing populations lead to changes in employers' behaviour.

All of the major topics related to work and productivity are covered in the available data. Yet, each dataset focuses on specific issues and thereby limit the possibilities for analysing the complex interplay of associated factors. There is also a lack of data about the exact work content, which is, however, a useful indicator of inclusion

and task adequacy. Moreover, most datasets provide little information about the transition to retirement.

Education and learning

There are two important datasets on education at adult ages in Germany: the Adult Education Survey (AES) and the National Education Panel Study (NEPS). As both the AES and the NEPS only cover age groups under 65, life-long learning among people beyond employment age is not covered in the data. The ICT Survey, conducted by the Federal Statistical Office, provides data on the dissemination of information and communication technologies (ICT), and on the use of the internet in private households, also in relation to the usage of ICT for educational activities and the attendance of computer training courses.

The data situation in the field of education and learning is mixed. Available data cover a broad spectrum of topics, yet focus mostly on people below age 65. Information about learning trajectories and participation in education across the life course, especially among people in retirement, is very scarce. Only the survey on Competencies in Later Life (CILL), which is conducted by the German Institute of Adult Education and published in 2014, will provide respective data for people aged 66-80.

Housing, urban development and mobility

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS) and the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) include information on housing and attitudes towards the home and neighbourhood, which can be linked to health, wellbeing and other life domains. As one of the few longitudinal datasets addressing mobility, the Mobility Panel Germany (MOP), focuses on how and why people travel, and what forms of transportation they use. It is a regular and representative population survey, which, however, does not specifically address people aged 50 or older.

Overall, data on housing, the environment and mobility are limited, in particular with regard to the needs and circumstances of older people. While housing is covered in several interdisciplinary surveys, data on urban development and mobility is rarely included and generally scarcer. Data on mobility in later life is particularly limited, and in-depth analyses are not possible with the available data sources.

Public attitudes towards old age

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS) is the major source for describing and analysing attitudes towards old age and ageing. The DEAS also provides information about experiences of ageism in different life domains. Due to the cohort-sequential design and its interdisciplinary ap-

proach, the DEAS also allows for depicting social and individual change in attitudes towards ageing. Moreover, it is possible to analyse the effects of life transitions (e.g. retirement, health events) on images of ageing and factors that determine different attitudes towards ageing. However, the questions focus on the individual images of ageing. Societal views of ageing are assessed broadly, without providing details on attitudes regarding issues like extending working life and retirement. The DEAS does not cover the oldest old and the institutionalized population either.

Social, civic and cultural engagement

Various datasets provide information on the usage of new technologies by older people. However, the availability of detailed or individual-level data is limited. For example, the annually conducted ICT Survey on Information and Communications Technology by the Federal Statistical Office provides general data on the dissemination of information and communication technologies, and on the use of the internet in private households. The Adult Education Survey (AES) records data on computer usage as part of vocational and non-vocational continuing education.

In sum, the data on uses of technology in Germany are limited. Although the existing data sources provide reliable and valid data, opportunities for empirical analyses are restricted. This seems unfortunate as the baby boomer generation is growing older, and little information is available on their technology interest, usage, and acceptance in the field of new media, healthcare, independent living, or work.

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Wellbeing

The major data sources in the realm of wellbeing are the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). The DEAS allows for detailed analyses of the determinants of wellbeing, cross-sectional differences within age groups or over time (trend analysis). The SOEP is an important dataset on wellbeing since it includes a variety of questions on wellbeing and has recorded life satisfaction annually for over 25 years.

Wellbeing is assessed with at least one basic question in most German datasets, which allows for explaining individual differences in wellbeing by aspects like the social system, work and employment, housing and environment, social relations, and health. For specific sub-populations at risk, such as people in need of care or the institutionalized population, the available data provides less information.

Intergenerational relationships

Using the German Ageing Survey (DEAS), intergenerational relationships can be analysed in the context of psychological health and general health, as well as economic and sociological factors. The German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) also allows for the analysis of contextual factors and provides information on household and family composition, as well as financial transfers. The German Family Panel (PAIRFAM) depicts intergenerational relationships in a dyadic perspective, and pays particular attention to their multifaceted nature.

The data quality on intergenerational relationships in Germany is fairly high, and there are longitudinal data sources which allow for in-depth analyses. All of the major topics of intergenerational relationships, such as mutual support relationships, emotional closeness and frequency of contacts, are covered. However, it is difficult to analyse changes in intergenerational relationships over time in detail.

4. The data and the policy agenda: gaps and challenges

Although many data sources on issues related to demographic change are available, certain aspects, such as alternative forms of housing or long-term care, and specific sub-populations, including very old people, those that are institutionalized or people at the margins of the socio-economic strata, are not yet adequately represented in the data. Hence, the looming social challenges may be, in fact, underestimated. To better evaluate and anticipate the consequences of demographic change in Germany, a number of gaps need to be addressed, including:

- Most surveys do not include people who are very old and/or in need of assistance and care.
- With the household population being the target population of all major surveys in Germany, people who no longer live in private households are systematically excluded and not represented.
- People of poor health status are generally less likely to be included in surveys, also due to the significant interview burden associated with a survey.
- The data available are sufficient for investigating the economic “mainstream” of older people but exclude people living at the margins of the socio-economic strata. As the poor are major targets of social policy, more empirical knowledge could help the formulation of policy and increase its effectiveness.
- Non-German-speaking people are underrepresented in all major data sources. Hence, their needs and expectations may not be adequately evaluated and addressed.
- Current question modules do not capture many themes expected to become more important for older generations in the future, e.g. their housing plans, time allocation and social relations.
- The regional diversity of demographic change is not adequately reflected in current datasets, as there are not enough data providing sufficient information for detailed, small-scale regional analyses.
- Generational solidarity is essential for social cohesion. However, surveys in Germany have only partly begun to incorporate a generational structure (e.g. PAIRFAM or SOEP). Most available data are individual microdata that cannot be linked to household and family members.

This policy brief summarises the major data sources for the ten policy fields identified by the working group of the Data Mapping Project of the Joint Programming Initiative “More Years, Better Lives”. An extended version of the original text and more information on the described sources are available at <http://www.jpi-dataproject.eu/>.

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