

Survey of workers on: The effects of climate change in relation to safety and health at the workplace

The world of work and climate change

Global warming is causing a noticeable shift in the climate conditions around the world, and this is also affecting the world of work. How much do companies think they are being affected by climate change? And what adjustments have they already made? To answer these questions, the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV) carried out a representative survey in September 2022. More than 1,000 employees took part in an online panel survey. Almost half of the respondents were managers.

Awareness in companies

Just under a quarter of respondents state that climate change has already had an impact on jobs and work activities in their company. 43 percent are undecided and around a third disagrees.

The opposite was true when asked whether the company has already addressed the effects of climate change on safe and healthy work. A third agrees here, the number of undecided is almost the same at 44 percent and almost a quarter disagrees.

Management personnel have a greater awareness of the risks

So, are the potential effects of climate change not yet an issue for companies? This is not the case, because managers and employees have very different answers. If the results are

evaluated separately for employees with and without managerial responsibility, a more differentiated picture emerges. More than 30 percent of managers believe that climate change has had an impact on the jobs and activities in their company

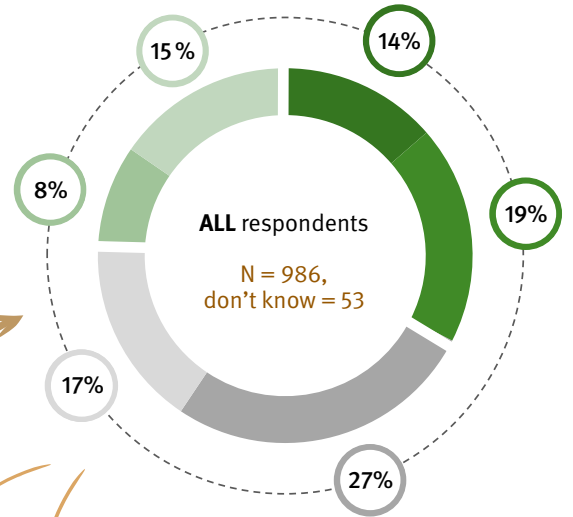
in recent years and 43 percent say that their company has already addressed the implications for safe and healthy work. This is not perceived as such by employees without managerial responsibility.



Awareness of climate change and its consequences

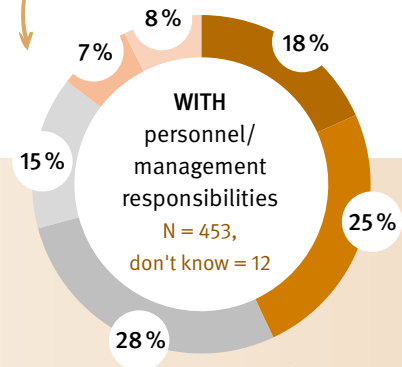
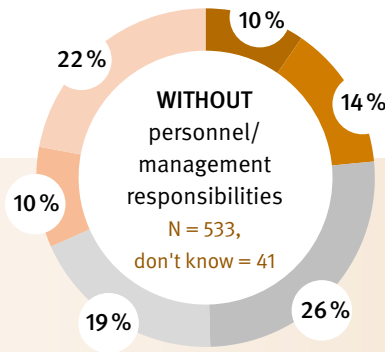


In my company, we have addressed climate change and the effects it has on a safe and healthy work environment.



A third of respondents agrees with the statement that climate change and its consequences have been discussed and addressed in their company (14% completely agreed and 19% largely agreed).

43% of the managers agree and only 24% of the employees agree.

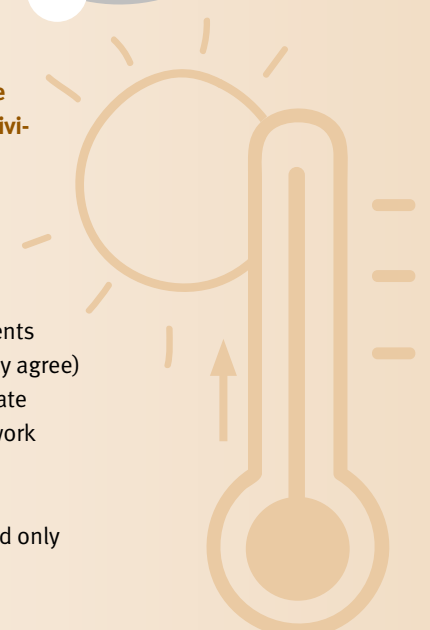
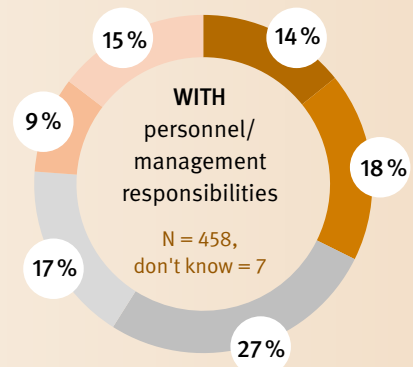
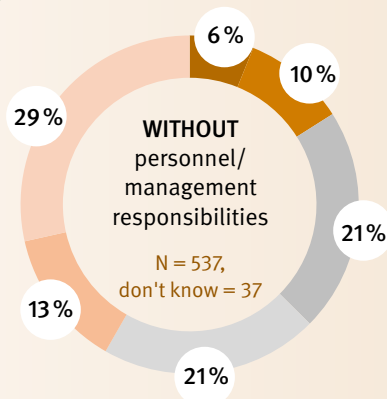
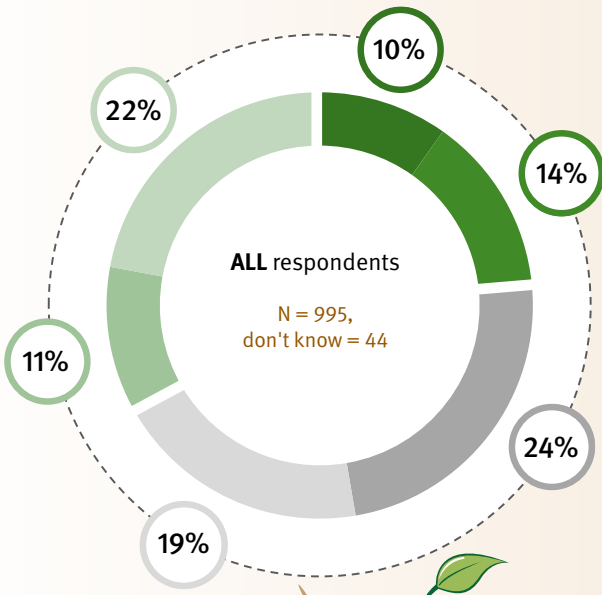


- Fully agree
- Largely agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Largely disagree
- Fully disagree

In recent years, climate change has affected jobs and work activities in my company.

Approx. 24 percent of respondents (10% fully agree and 14% largely agree) state that, in recent years, climate change has affected jobs and work activities in their company.

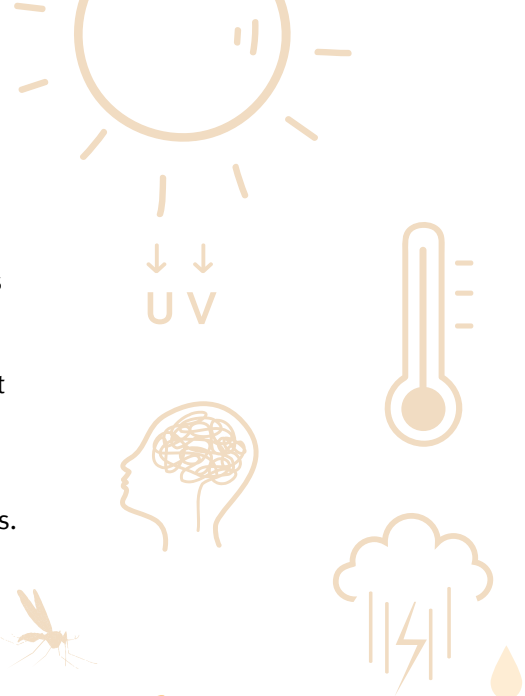
This is 32% of the managers and only 16% of the employees.



Risks for safety and health

The respondents were asked to assess how relevant twelve different risks associated with climate change are in relation to safety and health in their company. According to the respondents, the most urgent problems are accident risks due to heat and heat stress as well as of mental stress and mental disorders caused by the climate crisis.

In contrast, significantly fewer respondents rated allergies and new allergens (21.8%) and accident risks due to severe weather and the removal of consequential damages (19.6%) relevant. This is a result that can perhaps be explained by the composition of the sample, which includes many branches of industry whose workers do not work outdoors.

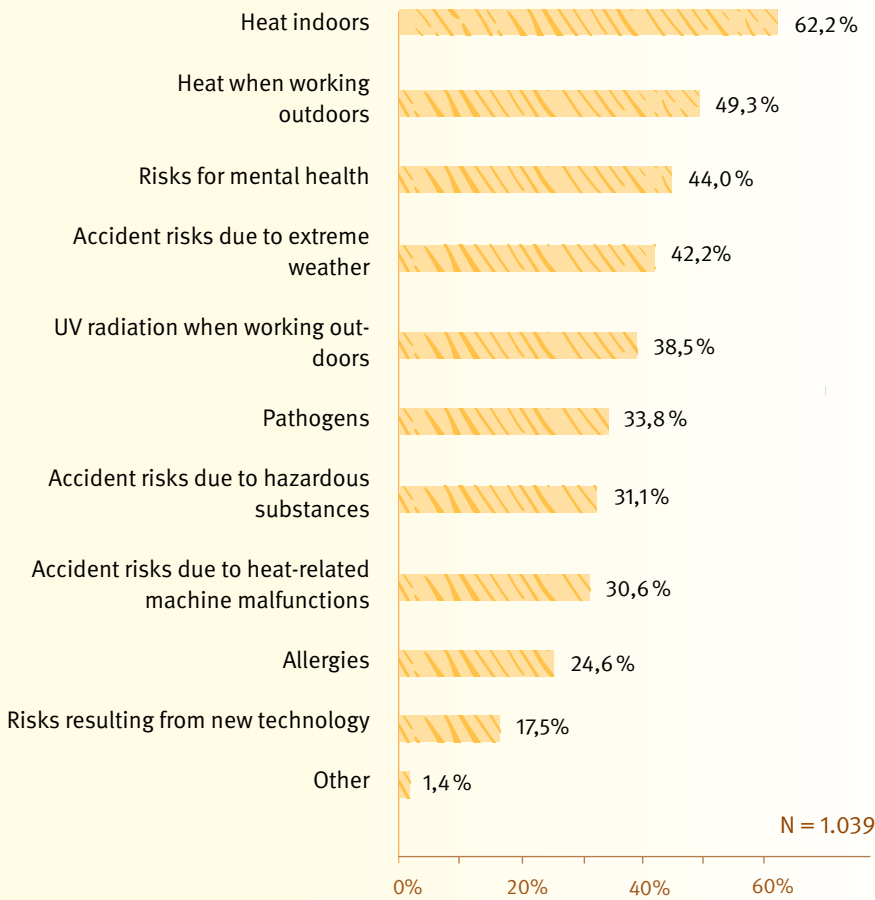


Perception of risks associated with climate change



In your opinion, which risks from climate change should be dealt with so that safe and healthy work is still possible?

(Multiple answers possible)



Need for action to ensure a safe and healthy work environment

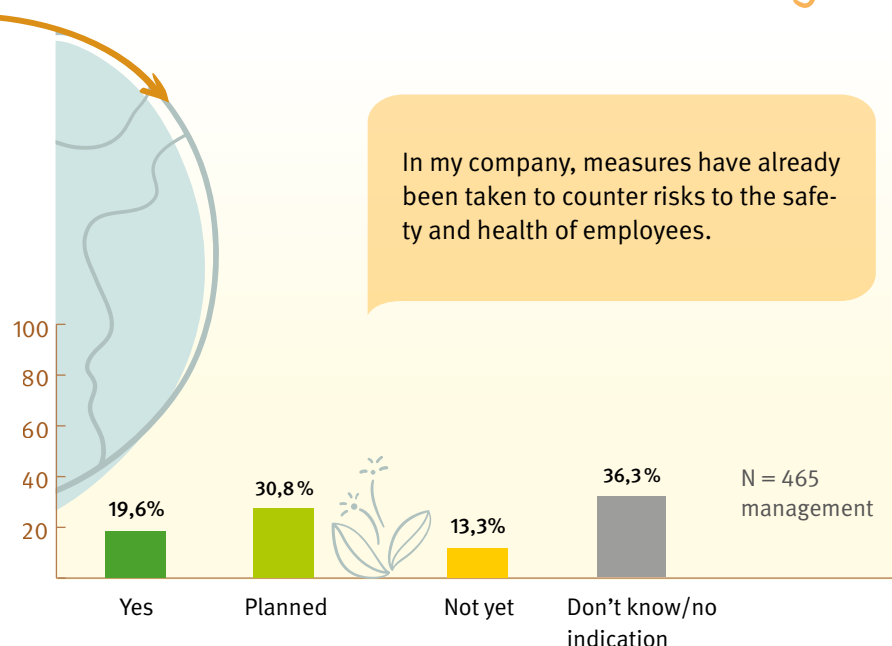
The employees were asked which risks associated with climate change they believe need to be dealt with so that a safe and healthy work environment continues to be possible. Around two thirds of respondents believe there is a need for action with regard to heat indoors and half of respondents when working outdoors. 44 percent of respondents would like to see prevention-based offers aimed at protecting the mental health of employees. The respondents also felt that there was a need for action with regard to accident risks that could result from extreme weather (42%), hazardous substances (31%) and heat-related faults (31%) on machines. A third also indicated that hazards due to pathogens must also be considered. A quarter made statements relating to adverse effects resulting from allergies and 18 percent voted for support for employees in relation to risks resulting from new technology.

Risks

associated with climate change

Implemented and planned measures in the companies

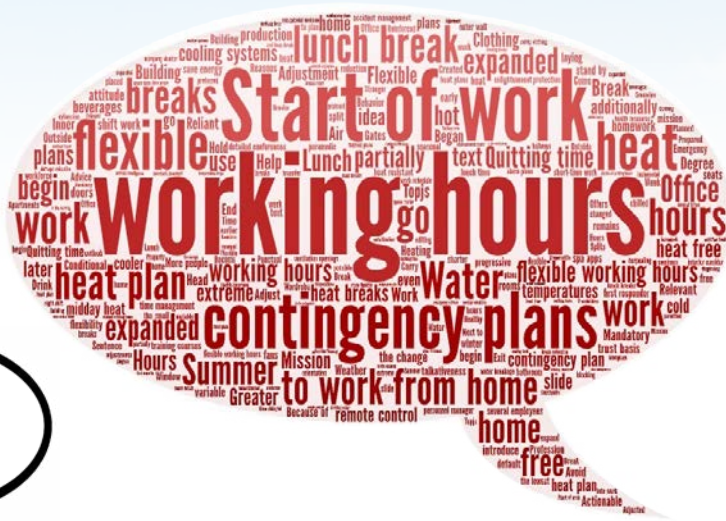
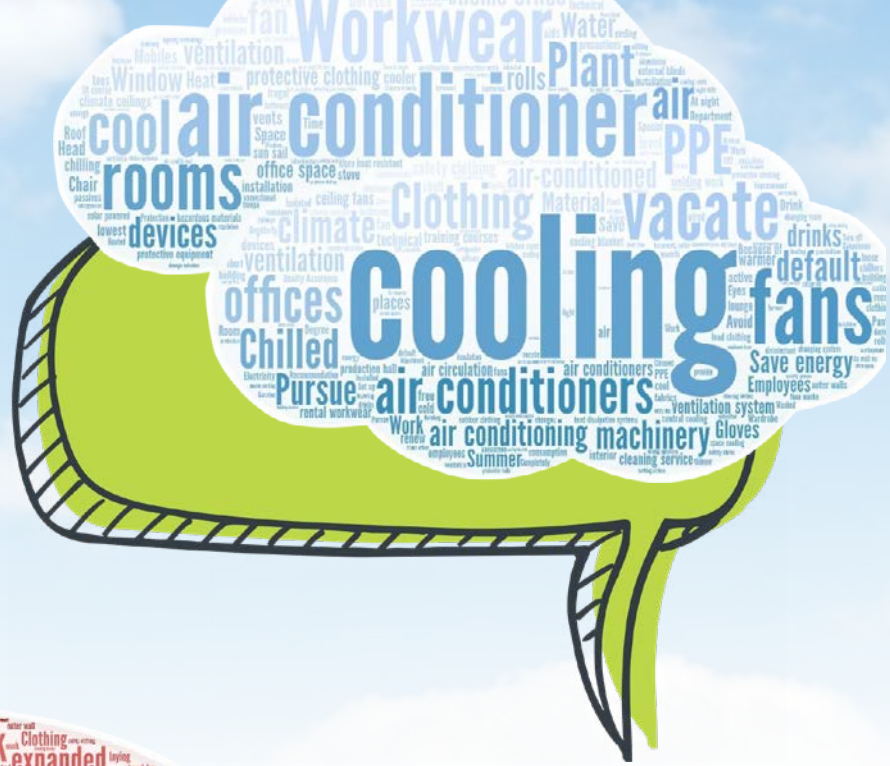
The 465 managers who took part in the study were asked separately whether measures have already been taken or were planned in their company to counter the risks mentioned. Half of the managers answered yes to this question. A fifth of the respondents states that they have already taken measures, while 31 percent indicate that measures are already planned. However, 36 percent provided no indication.



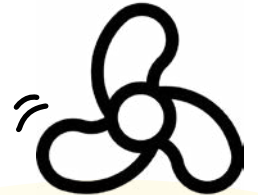
In my company, measures have already been taken to counter risks to the safety and health of employees.

Measures mentioned

If measures have been taken or planned, the managers were also asked to specify those measures. The measures mentioned are clustered using the TOP principle (technical, organisational, personal) and shown in tag clouds.



For the **organisational measures**, more flexibility in terms of working hours, working location as well as the organisation of breaks plays an important role. Plans for emergencies and heat-related incidents are also mentioned, along with training and awareness-building exercises for employees, utilising more staff and providing practical support for specialist personnel.

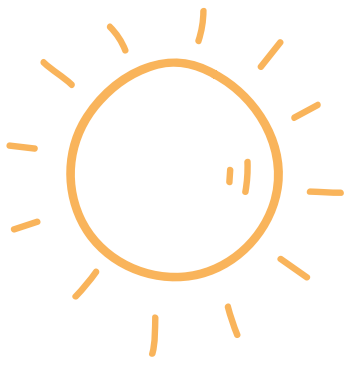


For the **technical measures**, the main things listed are air conditioning systems, thermal insulation and external blinds, as well as plants for cooling. Work clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE) are also mentioned. The modernisation of machines and devices and the general saving of resources are also addressed.

Since the respondents still remembered the heat waves of last, it is no surprise that frequently mentioned **personal measures** include access to beverages, light food and regular breaks.



The managers generally recommend making use of the company' occupational health management measures, training and courses as well as team meetings to remain healthy, motivated and thus productive. Aside from this, managers believe that it is advisable to exercise, maintain a healthy diet and get enough sleep.



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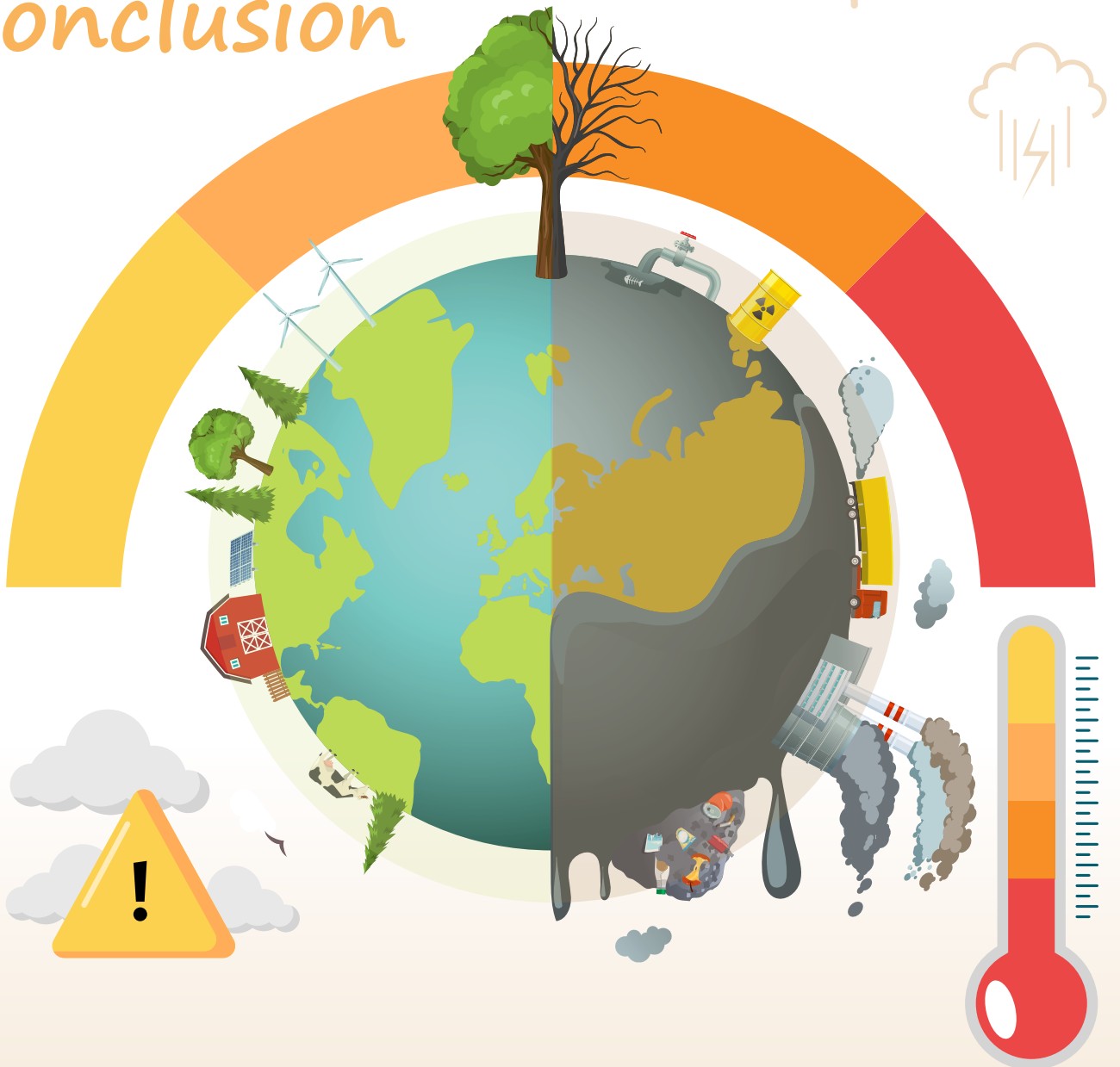


Climate change is not something that is going to happen in the distant future. It is already having an impact on the health and safety of workers. Therefore, companies and institutions urgently need to discuss and address the already noticeable and foreseeable consequences of climate change. They need to consider adapting to changing climatic conditions when making investments for the medium and long-term future.

These are significant challenges. Therefore, reviews must be carried out to assess which prevention offerings can be put in place to support the companies and institutions.



Conclusion



Sample information

The panel sample consisting of 1039 respondents is described in this section. The target group were employees in Germany covered by social accident insurance (with representative samples from different branches of industry). The sample included 465 managers with either personnel or management responsibilities. The method used was a standardised online questionnaire. The survey time frame extended from 13/09/2022 to 30/09/2022.

The conception and evaluation of the survey was carried out by the Institute for Work and Health of the German Social Accident Insurance (IAG).

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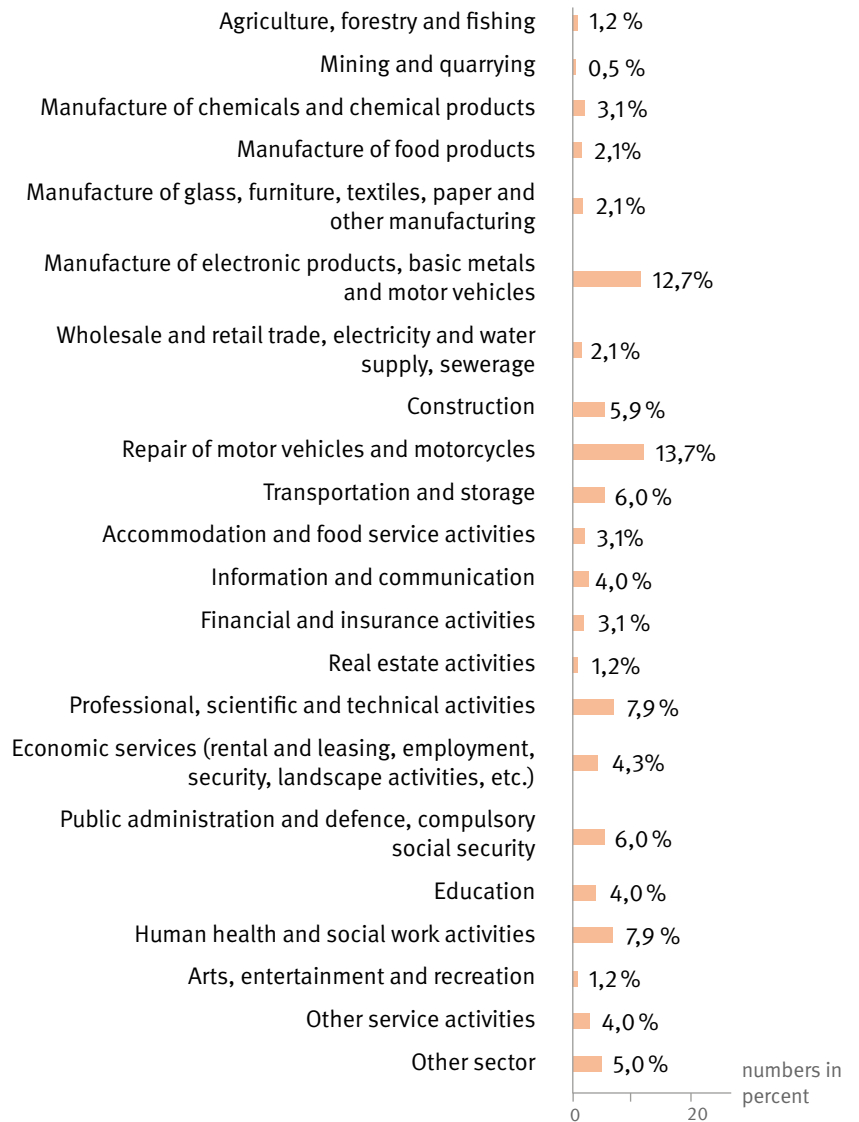
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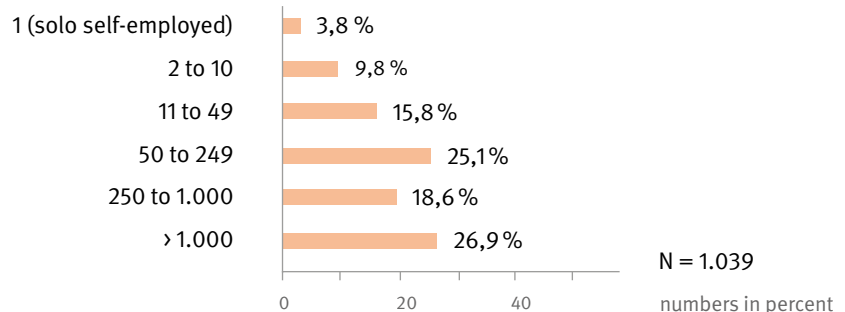
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Which sector do you work in?

N = 1.039



How many people does your company employ?



Do you have personal or management responsibilities at work?

